

Research in Difficult Settings: Reflections on Pakistan and Afghanistan

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the challenges of research and research communities in difficult settings. Specifically it looks at Afghanistan and Pakistan, two countries that share some political developments and violence along their border, yet that are immensely different in the scale of their problems and their development. The paper starts with a description of the political realities within which the research environment has developed over the last three decades. This is followed by an examination of *eroding research capacities* in social science as well as public sector attempts at building or neglecting these in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The next two sections discuss the different *categories of research* and current trends in government, donors and NGO *priorities* for development policy and practice. The paper primarily relies upon the author's experience and secondary research, as well as extensive qualitative interviews with research and policy professionals in the two countries.

Both countries are unenviable for their research capacities. Thirty years of conflict in Afghanistan decimated the education sector, with the result that it had to be built from scratch post 2002. In Pakistan, militarization and "Islamization" were strengthened by the support to the Afghan Jihad as well as domestic questions about religion and the state. In both countries, political instability and severe human resource constraints stalk progress despite heavy investments in higher education.

Priorities that promote hard sciences and business and management studies have all but destroyed rigorous social science. There are few links between academia and the development sector. Generally, government-funded research institutes see their purpose as justifying government policy rather than questioning it. Many researchers who could contribute to public policy debate have become consultants, whose reports are unavailable in the public domain. Independent development research, carried out by a few prominent NGOs and research centers is independent of government, but is constrained by donor priorities. Independent researchers—public intellectuals—have emerged who are not affiliated with institutions. Unlike state intellectuals, public intellectuals can produce original work that raises pertinent questions about policy and ground realities. Other intellectuals, frustrated with carrying out research according to donor priorities, are considering forming consortiums to negotiate the topics of research. Individual and collective initiatives from public intellectuals need support.

The three categories of research: research as theory building, action research and policy research, are conducted and funded by different types of stakeholders. Organizations that support research fund all three categories, while development donors prefer to fund policy research, which is narrowly defined. This becomes problematic when the bulk of available funding goes into short-term projects that require quick solutions. Longer-term research initiatives that allow time for reflection and learning also need to be supported. Afghanistan and Pakistan confront not only lack of research capacity and lack of proper data, but also lack of time among policy makers to read research reports. Policy makers are always in haste, responding to an immediate crisis. Under such circumstances innovative initiatives that combine research advocacy through mass media, especially radio and television, have yielded positive results.

Some types of research are sensitive and put researchers and institutions at risk, while in some cases the geographic area where research is conducted may be a high-risk zone. In both cases, researchers and donors face dilemmas which include ensuring the security of

researchers and respondents; the confidentiality of data; fears of offending the government; and questions about the ethics of undertaking certain types of research and survey work, especially if it serves political interests. Though some of the issues, such as ensuring the physical safety of research teams are addressed, and some issues could be included in project design, other issues of ethics need to be debated through public forums.

The three stakeholders of development research in Afghanistan and Pakistan—the government, non-government research institutes, and donors—face a variety of challenges: governments are overwhelmed by constant crisis and violence. Non-government research institutes lack staff capacity; endowments/institutional support and often ‘forget’ their original mandate. Donors need to show tangible results to taxpayers at home; therefore they fund projects that can demonstrate a success story. Quick solution-oriented work with short-term impact has higher chances of being funded. Donor constraints also extend to their relations with the host government. Their ability to access difficult areas constrains them from funding researchers and survey teams in high-risk settings as monitoring is impossible.

The broader message is that there is no single solution, but multiple, complementary efforts are needed to strengthen the research environment. Although there are severe limitations that researchers face in Afghanistan and Pakistan, there are also openings that can be strategically used for supporting a research culture. To foster research in developing countries undertaken by the people of those countries for their own development, I have the following recommendations:

- Create flexible pools for funding research
- Create study-abroad fellowships for researchers at risk
- Train researchers on an ongoing basis
- Support researchers to use mass media, such as TV and radio, which are effective tools for policy debate in a setting where few people read
- Build research capacity into development projects
- Consider ethical and methodological issues to ensure the physical safety of all involved, the confidentiality of data, so that respondents know what to expect
- Establish endowments or lifeline support that provides institutions with resources to pursue their goals and agendas
- Provide long-term sustained support
- Promote regional contacts and networks
- Create a South Asian University with campuses in different countries to provide intellectual space for experience-sharing and mutual-learning
- Encourage governments to invest in higher education
- Encourage staff to adapt to the challenges of supporting research in difficult settings

Résumé

Le présent document examine les problèmes que connaissent la recherche et le milieu de la recherche dans un contexte difficile. Elle porte en particulier sur le cas de l'Afghanistan et du Pakistan; certains aspects de l'actualité politique sont les mêmes dans les deux pays et ceux-ci ont en commun la violence qui sévit le long de leur frontière, mais ils demeurent immensément différents par l'ampleur de leurs problèmes et par leur niveau de développement. Le document débute par une description des réalités politiques qui ont influé sur l'évolution du milieu de la recherche au cours des trois dernières décennies. L'auteure traite ensuite de l'*affaiblissement des capacités de recherche* en sciences sociales, ainsi que des efforts fournis par le secteur public afin de renforcer ces capacités, au Pakistan et en Afghanistan, ou encore de la négligence dont elles sont l'objet dans ces pays. Les deux sections suivantes portent sur les différentes *catégories de recherche* et sur les tendances que l'on observe actuellement dans les *priorités* des gouvernements, des bailleurs de fonds et des ONG en ce qui a trait aux politiques et aux pratiques en matière de développement. Le document s'appuie principalement sur l'expérience de l'auteure et sur ses recherches secondaires, ainsi que sur des entrevues qualitatives approfondies qu'elle a menées auprès de professionnels de la recherche et de l'élaboration des politiques dans les deux pays.

La capacité de recherche n'y a rien d'enviable. Trente années de conflit en Afghanistan ont décimé le secteur de l'enseignement; après 2002, il a fallu tout reconstruire en partant de zéro. Au Pakistan, la militarisation et l'« islamisation » ont été renforcées par le soutien apporté au djihad afghan comme par les questions qui se sont posées, en politique intérieure, au sujet des liens entre la religion et l'État. Dans les deux pays, l'instabilité politique et un manque criant de ressources humaines entravent le progrès, en dépit d'investissements élevés dans l'enseignement supérieur.

La priorité accordée aux études en sciences exactes, en commerce et en gestion a pour ainsi dire anéanti toute recherche rigoureuse en sciences sociales. Il n'y a guère de relations entre le monde universitaire et le secteur du développement. En général, les instituts de recherche financés par l'État estiment que leur rôle consiste à justifier les politiques du gouvernement, plutôt qu'à les remettre en question. Beaucoup de chercheurs qui pourraient contribuer au débat sur les politiques publiques sont devenus des consultants, dont les rapports ne font pas partie du domaine public. La recherche indépendante pour le développement, exécutée par quelques ONG et centres de recherche de premier plan, n'est pas rattachée au gouvernement, mais subit les contraintes imposées par les priorités des bailleurs de fonds. Des chercheurs autonomes – des « intellectuels publics » – sont apparus; ils ne sont rattachés à aucun établissement. Au contraire des intellectuels d'État, les intellectuels publics peuvent produire des travaux originaux soulevant des questions pertinentes à propos des politiques et des réalités locales. D'autres intellectuels, qui trouvent frustrant d'avoir à effectuer des recherches en fonction des priorités des bailleurs de fonds, envisagent de se regrouper au sein de consortiums afin de négocier les sujets de recherche. Les initiatives individuelles et collectives des intellectuels publics ont besoin d'être soutenues.

Les trois catégories de recherche – la recherche ayant pour objet l'élaboration de théories, la recherche-action et la recherche sur les politiques – sont menées et financées par différents types d'intervenants. Les organismes qui financent la recherche subventionnent les trois catégories, tandis que les bailleurs de fonds oeuvrant dans le domaine du développement ont une préférence pour la recherche sur les politiques, qui est définie avec précision. Cela pose un problème lorsque la plus grande partie du financement disponible sert à réaliser des projets

à court terme visant à trouver des solutions rapides. Il faut pourtant appuyer aussi les travaux de recherche à long terme, qui permettent la réflexion et l'enrichissement des connaissances. Non seulement l'Afghanistan et le Pakistan possèdent une faible capacité de recherche et manquent de données fiables, mais encore les artisans des politiques n'ont pas le temps de lire les rapports de recherche : ils travaillent toujours à la hâte, en situation de crise. Dans de telles circonstances, les initiatives novatrices associant la recherche à l'action de persuasion par l'utilisation des médias, en particulier de la radio et de la télévision, ont donné de bons résultats.

Certains types de recherche sont délicats et mettent en danger les chercheurs et les établissements; d'autres travaux sont effectués dans des zones où les risques sont élevés. Ce sont des situations difficiles pour les chercheurs et les bailleurs de fonds : la sécurité des chercheurs et des répondants doit être assurée, il faut protéger la confidentialité des données, on craint d'offenser le gouvernement, et certains types de recherche et d'enquête soulèvent des questions d'éthique, surtout si les travaux servent des intérêts politiques. On s'emploie déjà à résoudre certains problèmes, comme la nécessité d'assurer la sécurité physique des équipes de recherche, et certains éléments pourraient être pris en compte dans la conception même des projets, mais d'autres questions relatives à l'éthique doivent faire l'objet de débats publics.

Les trois parties prenantes du domaine de la recherche pour le développement en Afghanistan et au Pakistan – le gouvernement, les instituts de recherche non gouvernementaux et les bailleurs de fonds – doivent affronter un éventail de difficultés. Les gouvernements sont débordés par la violence et par des crises successives qui ne laissent aucun répit. Le personnel des instituts de recherche non gouvernementaux n'a pas toutes les capacités voulues; ces établissements ne bénéficient pas de fonds de dotation ni d'un soutien institutionnel suffisants et « oublient » souvent leur mandat initial. Les bailleurs de fonds ont besoin de présenter des résultats concrets aux contribuables de leur pays; ils financent par conséquent des projets dont la réussite sera manifeste. Des travaux rapides axés sur les solutions, qui auront un impact à court terme, ont de meilleures chances d'obtenir du financement. L'action des bailleurs de fonds est également entravée par leurs relations avec le gouvernement du pays hôte. Les difficultés d'accès, dans certains cas, les empêchent de subventionner des chercheurs et des équipes d'enquête désirant travailler dans des endroits à risque élevé, la surveillance étant impossible.

Par conséquent, il n'existe pas de solution unique : des mesures multiples et complémentaires sont indispensables pour renforcer le milieu de la recherche. Bien que les chercheurs doivent composer avec des contraintes importantes en Afghanistan et au Pakistan, il y a aussi des occasions favorables qui peuvent être exploitées de façon stratégique afin d'appuyer une culture de recherche. L'auteure formule les recommandations suivantes, qui visent à stimuler la recherche menée dans les pays en développement par les chercheurs de ces pays, pour favoriser leur propre développement :

- créer des réserves flexibles pour le financement de la recherche;
- créer des bourses d'études à l'étranger pour les chercheurs exposés à des risques;
- former les chercheurs de façon continue;
- offrir aux chercheurs un soutien qui les incite à se servir de médias comme la télé et la radio, qui sont des outils efficaces pour faciliter le débat sur les politiques au sein d'une collectivité où la plupart des gens ne lisent pas;

- intégrer le renforcement des capacités de recherche dans les projets de développement;
- examiner les questions relatives à l'éthique et aux méthodes afin d'assurer la sécurité physique de tous les intéressés et la confidentialité des données, de manière à ce que les répondants sachent à quoi s'attendre;
- établir des fonds de dotation ou une forme de soutien de secours en vue de fournir aux établissements les ressources qu'il leur faut pour atteindre leurs objectifs et donner suite à leurs priorités;
- fournir un soutien constant à long terme;
- favoriser les contacts et les réseaux régionaux;
- créer une université de l'Asie du Sud qui aurait des campus dans plusieurs pays, afin d'offrir un espace intellectuel permettant la mise en commun des expériences et l'apprentissage mutuel;
- inciter les gouvernements à investir dans l'enseignement supérieur;
- encourager le personnel à s'adapter aux exigences que comporte le soutien à la recherche dans des contextes difficiles.

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Forward

This forward describes the circumstances under which the paper was written, as it is a metaphor for the challenges that confront researchers. It demonstrates not just the physical difficulties of research in difficult settings but also the intensity of the experience of violence in the midst of ‘normal routine’ life.

Pakistan witnessed between 3-5 suicide attacks every month between July-December 2008. A total of 725 people were killed, an average of 61 per month, due to 63 suicide attacks in 2008.¹ With military operations (including for carpet bombing) a constant flow of displaced persons and the targeting and destruction of development infrastructure, the government began to lose effective control over parts of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), the border province between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

In Kabul, the stark landscape testifies to the intensity of violence across three decades: bullet marks on the walls of houses in neighborhood after neighborhood, the caved roofs of former government buildings and soviet era tanks still adorning the roadside from the airport to the city. Reconstruction and new construction reflects the strong resilience of the people who emphasize the urgency for peace as they tire of the conflict and related human and material losses.

The intensity of violence is overwhelming in both settings even for those of us who have researched violence and security for years. The suicide bombings have successfully ungrounded us, while the extensive pre-existing structural violence continues unchallenged. In the midst of overwhelming odds, when state institutions are fraying or collapsing, and basic security deteriorates, it is difficult to analyze and theorize.

¹ For more details, see http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C12%5C31%5Cstory_31-12-2008_pg_7_27 accessed on April 21, 2009.

Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan are poised amidst political and social crises of varying intensities, and as in other countries in difficult situations, research capacities, discourse and spaces for theoretical reflection are impacted, compromised and overwhelmed.

This paper looks at the problems of research and research communities, and the challenges involved in supporting research in such settings. The primary issues include: a) overwhelmed or distracted policy communities; b) the limited mobility of researchers and limited freedom to publish critical findings; c) the erosion of existing institutions of higher learning and research; d) and the relocation of trained researchers and intellectuals to other countries.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been examined in this paper together, as neighboring countries with intersecting political developments and contexts of difficult situations and commonality of issues. Yet the paper also makes the imperative recognition that there is an immense difference in the scale of problems and their junctures of economic, social and political development. Almost thirty years of perpetual warfare and exodus of population from Afghanistan have not just destroyed physical infrastructure to near totality but also left only a notional civil society and intelligentsia. Though there is a significant effort at rebuilding and re-capacitating, the steps are too new and research abilities and knowledge-building efforts are rudimentary when they exist at all. In contrast, Pakistan has not experienced the physical destruction of its educational institutions like Afghanistan although its education system has suffered under militarization, political tensions and a spillover of the Afghan jihad in terms of campus violence. The research milieu in Pakistan is not enviable but compared to Afghanistan it has a more stable history, uninterrupted by violent conflict.

Given the challenging contexts of the two countries, this paper addresses the question of how social science research is used for development work in such locations by state and non-state funded actors; it delves into the limited choices involved in such locations and possibilities for critical interventions by dealing with the challenges of weak educational systems and challenging social development settings where basic security and the writ of the state are constantly questioned. (Please see the Terms of Reference, attached as annex 1).

This paper is divided into several sections. The first section examines the political realities within which the research environment has developed over the last three decades, followed by a section that addresses eroding social science research capacities and public sector attempts at building or neglecting these in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The next two sections discuss the different categories of research and current trends vis-à-vis government, civil society and donor priorities for development policy and practice. The last section contains reflections and recommendations.

Methodology — The methodology consists of a combination of reliance upon secondary literature and a heavy reliance upon qualitative interviews in line with the broad themes identified. Qualitative data was gathered through open ended and semi-structured interviews with different categories of stakeholders: individual researchers, research-based NGOs, donors, and government. The open-ended interviews captured the complexities on the ground (the interview themes and list of respondents are attached as Annex 2 and 3 respectively). Where it was not possible to conduct interviews in person, I relied upon email communication/interviews followed by telephone interviews. In addition, my own observations and experience of being associated with the research field for 15 years in

Pakistan have been incorporated into this paper. This paper is thus based on a combination of stakeholder views, literature from other developing countries contexts as well as the Pakistan Afghanistan context and my own reading of the situation.

1. Political Realities

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been in the limelight due to the Afghan jihad (1979-1996), the Taliban regime (1996-2001) and the War on Terror (2001-present). Pakistan is characterized by military rule and authoritarianism while Afghanistan is known for its prolonged conflict.

The differences between the two countries lie in their experience of colonization (Afghanistan did not experience colonization while the areas that constitute Pakistan came under British colonization) that led to different types of state and colonial intervention and consequently different levels of political, social and economic development. The movement for independence from colonial rule and the decision to be a separate state from India has colored Pakistan's development, aspects that the Afghan state did not need to address. The first university in the areas that are Pakistan was set up in 1882 – the University of the Punjab in Lahore – while the first university in Afghanistan was set up in 1932. A simple Internet search indicates that there are over 70 public sector universities in Pakistan whereas there are 23 universities in Afghanistan, 7 of which are new, established after 2002. While the education system was destroyed in Afghanistan after 1992, it has enjoyed relative stability in Pakistan. These facts alone set the two countries apart in terms of the development of social sciences.

Afghanistan, a monarchy until 1973, is also a multiethnic society. It escaped formal colonization but was maintained as a buffer between the British and Czarist Empires. Instability over the last thirty-five years is perceived to have begun when President Daud Khan ousted his cousin, King Zahir Shah in 1973. Following President Daud's assassination in 1978, two communist coups took place culminating in the entry of Soviet troops into Kabul in December 1979. Afghanistan plunged into a protracted conflict in which its neighbors, regional and international powers have been actively involved financially and physically. The Afghan conflict has undergone several phases including simultaneously a violent civil war as well as a proxy war between the USSR and the USA and later the USA and Al-Qaeda. Uninterrupted conflict completely destroyed Afghanistan's governance systems, including education, health, and infrastructure. Many experts have questioned the basis of the modern Afghan state, whether under Soviet influenced rule (1978-1992), Mujahideen rule (1992-1996), Taliban rule (1996-2001), or the present Karzai regime (2002-present) accompanied by the presence of Allied Forces.

Pakistan, often dubbed as a "failed state" and created in 1947 after India was partitioned, has experienced extreme inequalities. These inequalities led to the break-up of the country in 1971 (when Bangladesh was formed) and manifest themselves in the form of intra-state conflicts to this day. Pakistan's human development ranking has been consistently low, with the bulk of the budget going to the military rather than social sector development.² Investments in the military were primarily due to a hostile relationship with India (with the

² Pakistan's defense spending has been shrouded in mystery; the 2009-2010 budget allocated Rs 342 billion to the military and Rs 636 to public sector development projects. However, this is misleading as the defense budget does not include foreign military assistance estimated at US \$3 billion alone from the USA.

unresolved Kashmir issue being central to mutual antagonism), Pakistan's role in the Cold War, as well as the military's predominance in political power equations. This led to frequent military authoritarian rule that cemented economic and social inequalities along with creating intolerant attitudes toward the weak, whether religious and ethnic minorities or other dis-empowered groups such as women and children

In Pakistan, the politics of the Afghan jihad helped strengthen and prolong two military dictatorships (1977-88 and 1999-2008) interspersed by 10 years of shaky democracy (1989-1999). It also brought the 'Kalashnikov culture' into universities, and anti-women /anti-minorities legislation and policies to Pakistan. Conflict in Afghanistan, and militarization accompanied by IMF/World Bank-inspired economic policies in Pakistan, have added to pre-existing poverty in the two countries.

In Afghanistan, war and violence systematically destroyed the education system as education infrastructure (school, college and university buildings) and resources were completely decimated.³ Education standards declined with few students attending schools and universities due to insecurity. The Mujahideen forbade the teaching of natural sciences while the Taliban forbade the teaching of every subject except Sharia. Thus Afghanistan had to virtually start from scratch in 2002. In Pakistan, the education system fared better than in Afghanistan; however, the curricula were infused with increasing doses of orthodox interpretations of Islam and Islamic texts even in subjects not directly concerned with the teaching of religion.⁴ This trend became very pronounced during the Zia ul Haq regime. The more conservative groups received state patronage from the 1980s onwards and actively recruited students while enforcing their brand of morality through political, physical and religious intimidation.⁵ During this period interference in the curriculum by religious political parties' student wings on campuses turned universities into battlegrounds between different student groups. Universities thus were not sites for learning but sites of multiple conflicts. Between then and now, there are few if any development studies departments at public sector universities; the social science that is taught at these universities has not contributed significantly to policy.

2. Eroding Research Capacities

The consistent deterioration of the education system has not taken place in a vacuum. While the conflict in Afghanistan denuded it of its intellectuals and researchers, the low premium on education as a field/career in Pakistan has meant that the best minds opt for other fields that are either more prestigious and/or lucrative. In both countries, donor agencies, international NGOs or bi- and multilateral organizations offer attractive career and pay opportunities compared to public sector employment. This situation exacerbates the crisis in the education system as few join universities. The lack of an intellectual community prevents the emergence of a strong research community from developing.

³ Various interviews held in Kabul with intellectuals and academics, March 16-19, 2009.

⁴ For systematic documentation, see the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), *The Subtle Subversion: The state of Curricula and Textbooks in Pakistan*, SDPI, Islamabad, 2002; Updated 2006. This report conducts a content analysis of the curricula for social studies, English, Urdu and history and points out school and college level texts that incite students for jihad.

⁵ For example, there was heated debate about various texts as being obscene. Alexander Pope's *The rape of the Lock*, was deemed vulgar to be taught the Department of English, University of the Punjab. For details see, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jul/10/highereducation.pakistan> accessed July 19, 2009.

2.1 Afghanistan

The 30-year war in Afghanistan robbed it of most of its intellectuals (who were mostly killed by the warring sides depending upon whose side they were on) while others learned to be silent and/ or moved abroad. The university system was completely destroyed after Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan. Universities had to be built from scratch.⁶ As one respondent said, “we had to start from minus zero” after 2001. With relative stability in the urban centers, a tiny trickle of educated Afghans began to return in tandem with the entry of international consultants and experts. After 2001, the most prestigious university in Afghanistan – Kabul University – re-opened along with 17 other universities; seven new universities were established from 2004 onwards. According to the Afghan Compact, by 2010, approximately 100,000 students would be enrolled at universities and “the curriculum in Afghanistan’s public universities will be revised to meet development needs of the country and private sector growth.” Despite these goals, challenges remain as the university system continues to be plagued by the slow pace of curricula development, low student enrollment, and lack of trained faculty who can impart quality education to students.⁷ Many students are denied admission to university, as they do not have the equivalent degrees from Iran and Pakistan where they have studied.

Both the university system and civil bureaucracy face the issue of the ‘missing generation’ when no one was inducted into public sector employment between 1992-2002 due to the conflict. There are significant communication gaps between the senior bureaucrats and professors and their junior colleagues. The former are trained and familiar with centralized state-led order and younger professionals, with insufficient experience and knowledge, are more familiar with the neo-liberal system. Some who returned with foreign degrees feel isolated as ‘no one understands what they are saying.’ (interview notes, February 2009). The missing generation could have been an important link for bridging communication gaps between the two generations that currently staff government ministries and universities.

The Higher Education Ministry, responsible for re-establishing and setting up new universities, has had three changes of ministers over the last 5 years, making it difficult to implement consistent policies. The question of the curriculum and whether it would be allowed to change remains. However, an even more fundamental issue is the near absence of textbooks in Pushtu and Dari. The easy availability and affordability of Persian textbooks from Iran has raised apprehensions about Iranian cultural hegemony. Experts are concerned about the demise of Pushtu and Dari as languages of education and knowledge. They explain that junior faculty, more familiar with Persian than English,⁸ is entirely dependent upon these books. Afghan authorities need to develop the technical terminology in Pushtu and Dari for the advances in natural and social sciences over the last two decades, but such a vocabulary requires time to develop, computerize, publish, and subsequently train teaching staff at schools, colleges and universities in its’ application. Meanwhile, the student body that would

⁶ The administrative staff had to allocate time to advertise bids for architects, coordinate the selection of design for the universities, ensure quality building structures, and hire staff and faculty.

⁷ For example, there are 23 universities listed with the Higher Education Ministry; the total number of teaching faculty is 2367 for 48150 students. Only 137 teachers have a PhD degree, a majority of whom are at Kabul University (59) and Polytechnic University (36), while the remaining universities have a maximum of 8 PhDs or none at all on their faculty.

⁸ The English language was not commonly taught in Afghanistan, therefore, younger faculty cannot access web material and translate it into Dari and Pushtu easily.

provide the future stock for faculty continues to be educated using Persian textbooks.⁹ In the present situation a transition from Pushtu and Dari to Persian as the language of knowledge is resented while junior faculty needs capacity and training in their fields in order to improve the quality of education. Existing capacity is under-utilized. For example, some PhDs from Iran who have “the best education the region has to offer” are allegedly denied opportunity to teach at the university due to fears of Iranian cultural domination. Also, some Afghans who have been educated in Pakistan or India face problems of equivalence of educational qualifications.

Social science education at the university is not necessarily perceived to provide opportunities and solid training for a successful career path. Young Afghans prefer to join international organizations that pay well rather than the teaching profession where government salaries are extremely low.¹⁰ Responding to market demands, private colleges and skills centers, predominantly providing computer and English language training, have mushroomed in urban Afghanistan. Though these outfits cannot issue degrees, they are popular route for well-paid employment with foreign firms. The few private institutions that grant degrees, such as the American University of Kabul, are extremely expensive¹¹. The personnel at these organizations also complain about the quality of local teaching faculty and students need both intensive training in teaching methods and analytical thinking to be on par with international standards.

Setting up Independent Research Centers — Aside from research staff at government ministries, almost a dozen independent research centers for policy advice have been established and linked to Kabul University.¹² These centers focus upon specific issues. For example, the Center for Strategic Studies is set up to provide policy advice to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Afghanistan Institute for Rural Development (AIRD) revived in 2003 conducts training, policy research and dissemination in broadly defined issues of rural development (including peace building). The National Center for Policy Research, the National Legal Training Center and the Center for Policy and Human Development also produce policy research aligned with donor priorities.

NGOs and Policy Research — NGOs have played an important service delivery role since the Russian invasion in 1979; many were operating from neighboring countries, with a majority based in Pakistan. In Afghanistan, NGOs proliferated post 2001 when substantial donor assistance became available for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Many Afghan NGOs are working on peace building, human rights and advocacy, governance and women’s issues. The easy availability of funds, not matched by local NGO capacities, led to the overnight emergence of ‘briefcase NGOs’ with a dodgy reputation and dubious work with little impact. “The small research institutes set up by Afghans who had returned from abroad

⁹ Some faculty at Kabul University mentioned the acute tension on campus among student groups over revising terminology from Pushtu and Dari to Persian. For example, there was a proposal to change the word commonly used for university, *pohantun* (Pushtu) to *danishgah* (Persian).

¹⁰ Many respondents told me that a university teacher’s starting salary is between USD 50-60 per month and a full professor’s salary is around USD 250 per month. On the other hand, drivers employed by the United Nations receive around USD 200-250 per month and Afghans employed at higher positions are paid between USD 1000-3000 per month.

¹¹ For example, the American University of Kabul charges between USD 5000-7500 for a term making it very exclusive in terms of access by the common Afghan.

¹² A list of research centers, half of whom have emerged over the last one year or less can be seen at www.areu.org.af under the heading ‘research links’ (accessed 20 March 2009). The list can also be seen in annex 4.

could not compete with these dubious outfits which had ex-army, businessmen, and marketing types in them. They offered people like me all the money but did not have any vision. They were there only to make money and leave, which is what they have done.” (Interview notes, February 2009). This led to a process of scrutiny resulting in the re-registration of around 1600 NGOs with the government.¹³

International NGOs dominate the service delivery scene. The need to conduct grounded research for informing development interventions is recognized but difficult to accomplish due to insecure conditions in many areas especially the inaccessible remote areas. The NGOs identify site-specific research for their service delivery interventions. Thus for example, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has inked a MoU with AREU (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit) to conduct field research into issues and geographic areas where the AKF plans its work.

Many international NGOs and donors demand monitoring and evaluation of their projects. “A market for research, evaluation and monitoring has developed, and the demand is considerable. The sector supplying expertise is, however, quite small. Only a handful of organizations have significant research capacity. What can be called the Afghan contribution in terms of Afghan staffing and leadership accounts for very little of the vast activity of policy-related research, monitoring and evaluation that has accompanied the international program of reconstruction and development in the country after 2001.” (Christian Michelson Institute, 2008, 10). Private for profit organizations specializing in large surveys have captured the market. Their surveys have not enhanced local research capabilities though they may have produced good enumerators who double up as interpreters and guides for their foreign team leaders.

More recently, there has been growth in Afghan non-government organizations’ research capacity and credibility. According to the CMI Report (2008, 6-7), “Several independent organizations with a policy research function have emerged or been reinvigorated in the post-Taliban period. With a few exceptions, they are led and staffed by Afghans, many with university degrees from abroad. Almost all receive funding from international donors with a mixture of core and project based funding.” For example, the AREU was set up to conduct evaluations as well as provide independent policy advice based upon research initially to the UN but later to the Afghan Parliament. Its advice influences government policy. Similarly, the Khillid Group has conducted its own research upon issues of violence over the last 30 years, documenting and making public the atrocities committed under different regimes. The Center for Conflict and Peace Studies (CCPS) and the Kabul Center for Strategic Studies are relatively newer research centers that are funded by international donors but are considered independent in their views. The Organization for Sustainable Development and Research, set up in 1987 by the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan focuses upon community development and conducts commissioned research for various UN agencies including FAO, WHO, UNOPS and UNHCR as well as embassies in Kabul.

Complete dependence upon donors makes NGOs vulnerable to conducting research (including surveys that pass for research) only on donor priorities. As one respondent who heads an NGO put it, “if the international donor community leaves Afghanistan, we will disappear also.” It was also pointed out that the salaries that NGOs pay are not sustainable,

¹³ For more details, see the CMI website: <http://www.cmi.no/afghanistan/?id=127&Civil-Society> (accessed March 21, 2009)

therefore, making the NGOs themselves unsustainable in the long run and causing the death of small NGOs in the short term.

The fluid security situation also imposes severe constraints upon local and international NGOs. Many conduct fieldwork accompanied by armed escorts. When fieldworkers visit a tiny village in armored vehicles, the villagers are intimidated and simultaneously their expectations rise as they expect the research team to provide tangible rewards to them or the community. In addition, the research that an NGO may conduct may be valid for a particular length of time; if the area comes into the grip of conflict and violence, the research based interventions may be destroyed and need to be rebuilt from scratch again under a different set of circumstances.

There are several dilemmas that researchers confront at the community level during fieldwork in both Afghanistan and Pakistan and not all have been resolved. For example, some researchers believe that respondents must be paid for their time input—that they cannot parasitically enter a community, gather information and leave. Therefore, some set aside an amount to be paid but do not announce such in advance so the quality of information is not affected. Once the survey or other work has been completed in the area, an equal amount of money is distributed to all respondents. Others, who depend more upon qualitative information prefer to gift their respondent what they feel the respondent needs, e.g., medicine, clothes or bedding. Whether or not to compensate community members for their time continues to be an unresolved debate—one that needs to be tackled with sensitivity. Similarly, while there is a possibility that community expectations get built during fieldwork there are also occasions when community members ask researchers to leave, as they are bitter about previous experiences when no concrete project came to the village after the survey teams left. Some resolve these issues by telling the community that they can only make policy recommendations based on the information provided, but implementation is not within their power.

There are also occasions when fieldworkers and researchers may be at risk due to the security situation. The steps to ensure security range from providing health and life insurance, cell phones, liaison with police or civil administration, sensitivity to local cultural norms (e.g. male and female researchers in the field do not stay in one place), local language skills, sensitivity to ethnic and other identities, and reliance upon the fieldworkers instinct about potential dangers. Sometimes the ethnic or religious identity of the fieldworker may be a source of insecurity. These are aspects that organizations that undertake research in conflict situations must watch out for. Data collection can be delayed and even cancelled due to such risks that are common in active conflict zones. However, there continue to be committed researchers who feel that they must overcome these risks to be able to formulate the best policy paper, survey data or development intervention in the area.¹⁴

One can conclude that the research environment is steadily improving with Afghans returning to take lead roles. The demand for policy research is primarily donor driven. Building research communities require a stable political milieu, sustained funding and long gestation. Despite the availability of funding, building a critical mass of Afghan policy research capacities requires time before it can effectively influence the direction of policy debates,

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion of these issues, see also Omidian (2009), and Chris Huggins, “Introductory notes on conducting fieldwork in challenging environments”, Source: <http://community.eldis.org/ChrisHuggins/Blog/Introductory-Notes-on-Conducting-Fieldwork-in-Challenging-Environments-u-Some-Security--Ethical-and-Methodological-Issues> accessed June 2009

policy interventions and implementation. Meanwhile, the pressure to rebuild Afghanistan quickly brings in foreign consultants with scant knowledge of ground realities to undertake policy development. Ministers, parliamentarians and senior bureaucrats seldom have time to read the reports and recommendations. Their primary focus is to obtain funds for onward disbursement; they seldom engage with the nuances or tilts in a particular policy. Thus, the existing environment presents challenges ranging from issues of language and curriculum development and appropriate academic qualification for teaching staff, to issues of research ethics and expertise. Some of these gaps are bridged through short and long-term training made available within and outside Afghanistan to the small cadre of professionals working in these areas. While Afghanistan has made significant improvements over the last few years, it still has a long way to go in view of uncertain political realities and severely limited human resources.

2.2 Pakistan

Unlike Afghanistan, Pakistan has not undergone foreign intervention or protracted civil war though it has experienced extensive internal conflict over the years. The Afghan jihad affected Pak-Afghan border areas in tangible ways and Pakistan's political fabric in intangible ways. For example, it affected the universities by bringing in violent student politics through conservative religious political parties backed by the state with arms and funds and pushing intolerant curricula. With curbs on what could be taught, and Vice Chancellors belonging to or sympathizing with religious political parties, a majority of the progressive faculty was driven out of public sector universities in the 1980s. Some went into exile while others formed or joined NGOs in Pakistan.¹⁵ With few competent teachers left, social science research became the main casualty on university campuses. This has in turn impacted local capacities for development work and research. This situation is compounded by local preferences for fields such as business studies, computer sciences, management sciences, engineering or medicine. Students who failed to gain admission into these disciplines opted for social sciences where they had an advantage if they knew English. This enabled them to take the civil service examination and those who were not selected (hailing predominantly from Urdu medium schools) usually applied for a teaching position at a college or university.

The decline of public sector education is circumvented by the emergence of a tiny private sector university system. Initially these universities catered to disciplines that had a market, such as the Aga Khan University of Medical Sciences, the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) and the Lahore School of Economics (LSE). After September 2001, when Pakistani students faced difficulties obtaining visas, the Beacon House University was established to cater for social science subjects including media studies, while LUMS also added a social sciences wing. Students graduating from these universities successfully compete internationally for employment and scholarships abroad. The only caveat is that students at these universities are predominantly from privileged classes who can afford to pay the high tuition fees.

¹⁵ Many good teachers left universities in the 1980s because they could not condone the open cheating during examinations or ignore the flouting of other university regulations (e.g. class attendance) under threat from political parties' student wings. The university administration often sided with the students in their pursuit of passing exams through unfair means in the name of maintaining law and order. This was the time when there were fierce gun battles on campuses between different student wings. An environment of inquiry and research could hardly be nurtured under such circumstances. This note is based on my own personal experience and observation.

A class distinction is visible amongst the different student bodies of public and private universities. Those with the means send their children to English-language private schools and universities where foreign trained faculty is available. Public sector universities have fewer teachers trained abroad; the student body is also from predominantly Urdu-language government schools. There is thus a clear division between those who teach and attend private universities and those who join public sector universities. Such divisions have not gone unnoticed. To bring public sector universities on par with international standards, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) initiated several programs of sending teachers and students abroad (though 80% of these were in natural sciences, engineering and economics) for higher education as well as attempting to attract foreign faculty at internationally competitive salaries. It also created the tenure track system within universities, providing incentives to faculty for publication and making faculty salaries competitive with private sector universities. Some of the established colleges were also given the mandate to become universities; for example, Government College Lahore became Government College University; the Foreman Christian (FC) College became FC University; Kinniard College for Girls became Kinniard University. While the HEC initiatives remain to be evaluated, few foreign faculties were interested in relocating to a country mired in political instability and violence. Thus the overall situation of public sector higher education, especially in social sciences remains bleak though there continues to be growth of the private sector higher education.

The Pakistani state has consistently focused on higher education; however, in terms of overall allocations for the education sector, the budget has remained below 2% of GDP for the last five years, among the lowest in South Asia. Generally, UNESCO recommends 4% - 5% of GDP allocations for education. The literacy rate for Pakistanis aged 15 years and above is only 49%. Below is a brief account of the Pakistani government attempts to build research institutes and specialized centers linked to the university system for policy advice.

To address research capacities and the deteriorating education standards, the authority in charge of higher education, the University Grants Commission (UGC), later renamed the HEC established Centers for Excellence in all major public sector universities in the 1970s. The Centers for Excellence were to produce masters and PhD degree holders and in so doing boost research publications and capacities. Different centers for excellence were established: center for excellence in physics, in American studies, Pakistan studies, women's studies (later renamed gender studies), Central Asia, Europe etc. The Centers were financially independent of the universities as they received their budget directly from the UGC. During the initial years in the 1970s, these Centers attracted bright academicians from abroad due to the better salary structure and availability of research funds. However, the student quality did not improve in tandem with the professors who returned as students exposure to a substandard education could not be mitigated by two years of work with a talented professor. Plagiarism continued among the student community whose inadequate English language skills contribute to a lack of original publications that could be published in respectable journals.

Policy advice — The government established different institutes to provide policy advice. A simple Google search on research institutes in Pakistan yielded a partial list of around 80 research institutes ranging in focus from chemistry to Islamic law to environmental protection. With regard to development issues, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) affiliated with the Quaid e Azam University in Islamabad and Applied

Economics Research Center (AERC) affiliated with Karachi University were among the first to be established for economic and social development research. The Institute for Regional Studies and Institute for Strategic Studies provide input to the foreign policy establishment.¹⁶ Staff at these state-funded institutes is governed by governmental rules and regulations.

Over the years, various hierarchies have manifested themselves including those of seniority/grade and age making these places more like government offices than vibrant institutions with researchers debating different positions and their implications for policy. Commenting on the declining standards of public sector institutions, Akbar Zaidi writes (2002, 3646): “Institutions in the public sector no longer provide a base for social scientists to congregate as they once did three decades ago; there is no academic or intellectual community.”

By the late 1980s western donor support for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) became available, leading to the proliferation of NGOs. The NGOs that were formed as a result are mostly donor driven. According to Omar Asghar Khan (2001, 276), “It was during the Afghan War in the 1980s that there was a rapid increase in foreign-funded NGOs involved in cross-border relief operations. The proliferation of NGOs also extended to religious madrassas (seminaries/schools) in the 1980s when funding to religious educational institutions increased substantially from both the Pakistan state and from foreign sources, mainly from the Arab states and Iran.” Two types of NGOs were born—one deriving their mission from religious frameworks and the other based in secular development thinking perceived to be inspired by western values.

The religion inspired or faith-based organizations (FBOs) that spawned in the aftermath of the Afghan Jihad were mostly religious political party sponsored madrassas that were sites of basic schooling for poor children, not sources of development policy debate. Many of the madrassa-educated children were used for fighting the war in Afghanistan. As such, they contributed to violence that has impacted all facets of life in Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the culture of research when it was deemed western. The organizations that shape their worldview and frameworks rely upon specific interpretations of regional and international politics (especially, Kashmir, Afghanistan and Palestine) and not development debates and interventions. Islamist political parties with strong ideological underpinning refrain from any systematic informed argumentation about development policy though they have positions on women’s freedoms and monetary policy issues especially credit and interest.¹⁷ Only one religion-based political party, the Jamat-i-Islami (JI) runs a think tank that produces position papers for its parliamentarians. This think-tank does not engage with NGOs or other civil society groups seen to be shaped by western thinking and funding.

The development NGOs—that view development as a right rather than charity—have been present in Pakistan since the 1950s. As mentioned earlier, they proliferated during the late 1980s and 1990s. They were designed as mirror images of western institutions to carry out

¹⁶ Other scientific institutes were also established such as Pakistan Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR), IRNUM (Institute of Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine), PARC (Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission) but these are outside the purview of this paper. An internet search yielded a partial list of 80 research institutes in Pakistan. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Research_Institutes_in_Pakistan for details. (Accessed December 15, 2008)

¹⁷ For a detailed account of faith based organizations views on development, see Rubina Saigol and Fatimah Ihsan, “Religions and Development: Values and Beliefs and their Relationship with Key Development Concepts” Report prepared for University of Birmingham/LUMS Project entitled, “Religions and Development” Final Draft March 2009

work where the state had either failed or was unable to deliver. Experimentation with different models of development, accompanied by advocacy and training became the norm with many such organizations. These organizations received a boost from the different world conferences and conventions on development. In Pakistan, NGOs received support for research and advocacy for the follow-up actions marked at the different UN conferences as well as development-related work specific to Pakistan. In addition, international NGOs also undertook research for designing their long-term programs and interventions. Thus a number of NGOs became active in participatory action research, training and rights-based advocacy.¹⁸ By the late 1990s almost every district of Pakistan had an NGO coordinator, and provinces had their NGO forums that came together to form the Pakistan NGO Federation.

In Pakistan, NGOs can be categorized in the following manner vis-à-vis development issues and policy advocacy:

Development Experiments — Some NGOs were formed to follow and experiment with particular models of development. For example, the Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Karachi follows a participatory approach in which local communities empower themselves on a self-help basis rather than wait for the state institutions to reach them. This model also demonstrated to the government that it is more cost-effective than government interventions. The OPP model, derived from earlier experimentation in rural development, has been replicated at the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (RSP) and subsequently other rural support programs with government support throughout the country. While the focus of the RSPs is to achieve practical benchmarks, the leadership is now beginning to document the experience of the RSPs over a twenty-five year period as a means of theorizing and disseminating the approach to the wider development and academic community.

The Zia ul Haq government took a number of anti-people steps, e.g. it rendered women and religious minorities unequal citizens through discriminatory legislation, it exercised tight censorship and control over media, culture and the arts, it purged universities of progressive faculty and ‘Islamized’ curricula. In reaction, many activists and intellectuals joined advocacy-based civil society groups that had emerged by the late 1980s (Khan 2001, 276). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) —modeled along most such commissions internationally— has been a torchbearer for flagging violations of and campaigning for human rights, especially the rights of women and religious minorities. HRCP was among the lead organizations to systematically expose the impacts of the Zia regime’s anti-women and anti-minority legislation. HRCP produces an annual report on the *State of Human Rights in Pakistan*, which is based on verified information published in the newspaper and elsewhere. Other leading women’s organizations have also worked closely with HRCP to advocate for women’s equal rights whether in the economic, social or political contexts.

Some NGOs undertake large surveys, opinion polls, project evaluations and monitoring, especially of donor funded projects in partnership with the government. Others produce project or situation reports specific to a project deliverable, that provide information, analysis and recommendations. Such reports also provide valuable data but the data is often a one-off

¹⁸ For example, Shirkat Gah Women’s Resource Center, Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER), Applied Social Research (ASR), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Social Policy Development Center (SPDC). Other NGOs that commission out research include the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Aurat Foundation, Patan, and South Asia Partnership Pakistan (SAP Pk). International NGOs that commission research are Action Aid Pakistan, and Oxfam.

effort that does not provide a consistent picture across time. While national-level data may exist, the NGO data is specific to a particular area and therefore becomes the basis for local-level interventions including advocacy. However, it fails to generate any debate about the underlying approaches to development that may have resulted in the situation captured by the data.

Questioning Development Frameworks — Reports that engage with theoretical issues in development are few and are produced by those who have studied abroad and been exposed to a particular academic milieu. Some questioning of donor assumptions and challenges to their approaches were produced at the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on the issue of environment and South-South collaborative research. The Social Policy Development Center (SPDC) and SDPI project reports and monographs have questioned World Bank concepts of implementing development. Many of these have been published in the SPDC Annual Report series and the SDPI annual conference anthologies. There are also critiques of western development practice by faith-based organizations, especially political parties and their think tanks. For example, while they favor separate (unequal) roles for women and advocate for education to be modeled around this philosophy, they actively oppose microcredit as a poverty alleviation strategy as un-Islamic.¹⁹ Few if any reports on either side make a conscious effort toward theory building.

SDPI and SPDC, the two leading research-based NGOs prefer hiring foreign qualified researchers at senior positions; however, research priorities have been dictated by the availability of project funding. In the absence of endowments, senior researchers and directors are under pressure to generate funding, while donor funding priorities keep shifting and the project cycles shrink. Donor projects come with their own set of conditions that restrict the researchers to narrow ways of conducting policy work. Projects constitute a temporary lease on life for NGOs; they are not designed to lead to sustainability. At SDPI we often talked about ‘death through projectization’ as researchers were not free to reflect upon and theorize about issues emerging from project work. Before a project ended, the researcher was under pressure to look for another project to ensure that funding continues uninterrupted. This does not mean that SDPI researchers were unable to pursue their research priorities but to indicate that it was tough to do so. Despite these odds, SDPI succeeded in conducting research on decentralization, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its implications for vulnerable groups, women, conflict and security as well as trade and sustainable development. It also conducted advocacy campaigns, trainings and organized a weekly seminar on public interest themes.

While there is a clear distinction between the non-government research institutes and public sector research institutes, both face constraints. The public sector institutes suffer under the weight of governmental salary scales, rules, hierarchies and low incentives for researchers to engage with the latest research. The private sector institutes lack assured funding, hence research priorities respond to the availability of project funding. In addition they face institutional development challenges such as the absence of appropriate human resource strategies and financial systems. On the one hand, public sector institutions have assured funding but few incentives for cutting-edge research. On the other hand, non-government research institutions lack core funding or endowments and seldom have the opportunity to conduct research on their interests and priorities. Research capacities in both types of

¹⁹ For details, see Rubina Saigol and Fatimah Ihsan, “Religions and Development: Values and Beliefs and their Relationship with Key Development Concepts” Report prepared for University of Birmingham/LUMS Project entitled, “Religions and Development” Final Draft March 2009

institutions are hard to attract and retain over the medium- and long-term while both confront different institutional challenges.

Given the above, there are few research institutes that produce quality work on social and economic development issues and even fewer have a measurable impact in the short- and medium-term. Writing his report on the state of social sciences in Pakistan, Akbar Zaidi (2002) states, “During the course of this study, all the academics interviewed were asked to name 10 of the major or main research institutions in the country. Not a single scholar could come up with even 10 names. No one came up with more than five names, and four institutes were more or less on everyone’s list, with maybe one or two added on by one or two of the scholars; some names they themselves rejected since they did not inspire any confidence. There could be no better telling commentary on the state of social sciences and on social science research in Pakistan.”

There are a few individuals, termed ‘public intellectuals’²⁰ who are critical of research produced by the state institutions as well as NGOs. They engage with public interest issues that people face without being straitjacketed by institutional curbs.²¹ Such individuals, prefer to be free of the pressure to generate funds in NGOs by undertaking particular types of development work which at times is less self-reflective about the conceptual biases of particular development strategies. They question the discourses of development and human rights generated and reproduced by NGOs and the state. For example, Rubina Saigol questioned the slants in the global human rights movement. She breaks the inevitable connection between poor countries and human rights violations by pointing out that nazism was produced in one of the most ‘rationalized’ and ‘advanced’ countries in Europe. She also argued that free market economic policies and ideologies were leading to massive labor and women’s rights violations yet these policies were being imposed by WB and IMF, not backward poor countries. The NGO that had requested her to write the piece chose not to publish it and eventually she had it published herself.²² The reaction from the NGO community was negative as they felt that the critique of the human rights movement would jeopardize their work at the community level and that it would provide more ‘sticks’ to right wing religious parties who question NGOs motives and accuse them of being complicit with western imperialism.

Public intellectuals also dislike working with government institutions where they find grade hierarchies and associated rules and regulations stifling. Those working at public sector research institutes, called ‘state intellectuals’ by Itty Abraham, are non-threatening toward the state and in fact, are generally supportive of state policies, in whose support they write. There is little questioning of the status quo that comes from state/policy intellectuals. This group includes many involved with the nuclear programs of Pakistan and India, supported by the state institutions for research and praised by the media as great nationalists. Compared to the state intellectuals, public intellectuals cannot leverage policy directly. Their legitimacy and power comes from the ethical and moral positions they take on issues, even when these may

²⁰ Itty Abraham draws a distinction between Public Intellectuals, State Intellectuals and Science Intellectuals. He shared his ideas in his presentation entitled, “Policy intellectuals and Public Intellectuals” in the panel on Ir/relevance of Social Sciences in South Asia at the SDPI Annual Conference on Sustainable Development, held December 11-13, 2003. Reported in SDPI Research and News, January 2004.

²¹ See the writings of Akbar S. Zaidi, Rubina Saigol, Ayesha Siddiqua, Akmal Hussain, Mubarak Ali, Aifya Shehr Bano Zia and Nazish Brohi who are not affiliated with any institution but write extensively on subjects of public interest.

²² Rubina Saigol, *Insaani Huqooq ki Tehreek: Aik Tanqeedi Jaiza* (The Movement for Human Rights: A critical Reveiw) Fiction House, Lahore, 1998

not be popular. They often speak out against the grain. The main dilemma for such intellectuals is the lack of any physical and discursive space for debate and the lack of assured institutional protection if any opposing group is threatened by their research. For example, Ayesha Siddiqua's book, *Military Inc.: Inside Pakistan's Military Economy* (2007) questioned military commercial and business investments in corporate projects. As a result, intelligence agencies harassed her by pressuring staff at the venue of her book-launching ceremony to cancel the event.

3. Categories of Research

Research has multiple uses ranging from knowledge production through contribution to theory, policy, and awareness.²³ In developing countries, research as contributing to shifts in theory is viewed as useless while action research and policy research are emphasized for being ‘useful’ either to people or to the government or both. However, there is inevitable overlap among the three broad categories as each contributes to the other.

The discussion that follows contains greater details about Pakistan than Afghanistan. This is because research as a field of independent inquiry has to be revived from its ashes. The 30-year conflict destroyed what little institutional support existed for independent research. Setting up research institutions and producing a body of work to build on in virtually every field is a daunting task in the face of inadequate local capacities. According to the Christian Michelson Institute:

“The composition and dynamics of Afghan civil society have been influenced by more than two decades of war. Research and analysis of the changes that have taken place, however, is lagging behind. With the influx of foreign ideas and organizations, what could be characterized as indigenous Afghan organizations are changing, and it is likely that Afghan civil society - and perceptions of what civil society is - will be coloured by the current environment for some time before a genuinely Afghan civil society is in a position to recoup the space and functions of the 'third sector'.”²⁴

Theory Building

When research brings about shifts in theoretical constructs, it is considered to contribute to knowledge production. Much of this research is also considered ‘ivory tower’ discourse, intellectual exercise that is not in touch with ‘ground reality.’ Some thinkers believe that the sole purpose of research should be raising questions and issues rather than providing answers. According to Zaidi (Interview notes, October 2008) “Research is about identifying issues, explaining the theory behind what is taking place. It should not be descriptive or prescriptive.” He emphasized that there needs to be more of academic research and less of problem solving through policy work.

According to one respondent, the ‘demise of the university’ (Interview notes, August 2008) has led to ‘zero progress’ in the humanities and social sciences. They explained that, “[e]ven in our time, we were 10-12 of us but now there is nothing. For example, our material on peasant movements and peasant struggles was not used inside universities in Pakistan but used by outsiders. Inside universities, the teachers are not interested in research.” This is also borne out by the detailed assessments of different social science disciplines initiated by Inayatullah (2005).

Over the past decade, there have been attempts at strengthening social sciences across the region and provide opportunities for collaborative research: the Sephis Fellowships, SSRC Fellowships and the Ford Foundation Fellowships. The Sephis Fellowships are a South-South

²³ I have taken this categorization from Joanna Wheeler, “Creating Spaces for Engagement: Understanding Research and Social Change” www.drc-citizenship.org accessed September 2008

²⁴ CMI Website: <http://www.cmi.no/afghanistan/?id=127&Civil-Society>, accessed 21 March 2009

exchange program for research on the history of development.²⁵ The main objective is to make critical reassessments of development trajectories, their origins, course and effects. In this way, the Sephis Program expects to contribute to the search for new concepts with which to explain the social transformations currently taking place. The SSRC South Asia Regional Fellowships enabled junior scholars to take time off from teaching to complete research on a particular topic in social sciences, humanities and related fields. It was also open to providing scholars with opportunities to attend international conferences and produce peer-reviewed publications. Simultaneously, it became difficult to award fellowships as the criteria of a PhD had to be waived and gradually it was discovered that there were few applicants whose proposal quality met with the minimum standards required. The selection committee (of which the author was a member) constantly debated ‘lowering the bar’ to include researchers from countries like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as there were occasions when none of the applicants were selected. The Ford Foundation’s International Fellowship Program, awarded in almost all regions of the world, focuses on community development; knowledge, creativity and freedom; and peace and justice. It also supports language study, training in research and computer skills.²⁶ In South Asia, the focus was to encourage young researchers to conduct inter-country and inter-regional research. However, like the SSRC fellowships, the selection committee (of which the author was a member) had difficulty selecting good applicants after the first few years. The same experience has been repeated with regard to the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship where one fellowship is dedicated for Pakistanis.

The frustration with the level of social science debate is reflected in many ways. Many researchers believe that the lack of questioning from Afghans and Pakistanis about the manner in which their countries are studied and presented help define the nature of public policy and donor intervention. Some of this frustration was reflected in a press statement (May 11, 2006) when leading organizations (including SDPI) objected to the World Bank Pakistan Country Gender Assessment Report (released May 5, 2006) through a press release that questioned the premise that cultural conservatism lay at the roots of policy failure regarding women’s empowerment:

...we assert that the World Bank is absolving itself of responsibility for its role in the distorted development scene in Pakistan by focusing on negative cultural practices vis a vis women. We believe cultural practices do not exist in isolation and are articulated in newer ways and forms in response to existing and evolving economic, social, legal and political policies. The report fails to connect the perpetuation and exacerbation of misogynist cultural practices with increasing poverty and inequality that result from Bank inspired and motivated policies in Pakistan. The feminization of poverty is a direct result of policies such as the structural adjustment programs and the pursuit of mega projects. Women are the direct victims and survivors of these policies.

The press statement was also triggered by the manner in which the World Bank had neglected to include the work of those who had been requested to author background papers for the

²⁵ For details, see <http://sephisemagazine.org/> and <http://www.iias.nl/iiasn/iiasn4/gennews/2sepbro.txt> Funded by the Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation in 1994, the main focus is to historicize modernity and development and to promote a network of researchers in the South to exchange ideas on comparative historical research on long term processes of change. The Program provides for doctoral, post-doctoral research grants and lecture tours. For about Sephis fellowships, see www.sephis.org

²⁶ For details, see Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program at <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/147050/306>

report. The main report did not reflect any of the issues raised by local experts with in-depth knowledge of Pakistan. This practice was not new but had generated public protest and hence came into the limelight briefly.

Expressing frustration with the type and slant of policy research and manipulation of large surveys in Afghanistan, one respondent said, “it would be better to put the money into social history. It is important to understand the unresolved issues that are mostly ignored or people keep putting a political spin on them. A deeper understanding of larger issues of history is not there. And many times, the internationals come and put their own interpretation on Afghans—they manipulate the information to serve their purposes and often Afghans do not know the way to object to such policies based on misinterpretation of history. So, history keeps repeating itself. For example, they will continue to favor some ethnicities over others...” (interview notes, February 2009).

In the same vein, another respondent stated that research needs capital, a stable state structure and rule of law. In the near absence of these, various research reports can be produced by international organizations to justify their approach and intervention. As an example, he quoted the UNDP findings that 80% of justice in Afghanistan is traditional and informal and asserted that such conclusions would push Afghanistan away from civil law and strengthen systems that perpetuate injustice in the name of culture and tradition. The framing of culture and tradition to justify questionable development policy is a concern that resonates in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Without powerful critiques of such premises, the cultural arguments to justify unjust systems would continue to receive support.²⁷

Although there are opportunities for contributing to theory building and knowledge production, the main source of researchers, primarily universities, lack trained staff who could push for theory building. In fact, many at such institutions reproduce the dominant paradigm followed by the state and international organizations such as the World Bank. The demise of the university is almost complete in terms of contribution to knowledge production and theoretical shifts. There are neither incentives nor any tangible rewards for such contributions. The researchers and institutions with some understanding of such issues are constrained by the lack of funding and lack of interest by stakeholders in theory building. Many donors expect researchers to be managers; theoretical work is not expected to emerge from these settings. They are neither interested nor mandated to fund theoretical debates about development. Overall, one can conclude that with few exceptions, there is a lack of interest in theory building and a lack of knowledge about its importance. This is augmented by a dismissive attitude at the local level that term such engagements ‘*kitaabi*’ (bookish, out of touch with ground realities). Theory building is thus difficult not only due to lack of financial support, but also because all stakeholders, whether the state, donors, universities or local communities do not value it.

Action Research

While all research necessarily implies change, action research is directly concerned with positively impacting social processes to empower communities. Its purpose is to generate knowledge and theory on the one hand and effect change in people’s lives on the other hand. Separating theory and practice is considered a false dichotomy.

²⁷ Such logic was recently used in Swat, Pakistan to justify a dubious peace deal (Nizam-i-Adl) with a banned militant group.

Action research is in vogue with NGOs. Researchers work together with communities to generate knowledge together. While this knowledge has policy implications, its primary focus is not to inform policy but to impact people's lives. NGO approaches are also found to be problematic as often there is a concentration on participatory methods but NGOs fail to connect the results with theoretical paradigms. In the context of Pakistan, action research has been conducted by service delivery organizations (e.g. OPP—the Orangi Pilot Project later replicated by the Rural Support Programs with government support) as well as organizations that consciously claim to conduct action research: Applied Socio-Economic Research Center (ASR), Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER) and Shirkat Gah among others. The category of participatory research is also covered under action research.

While impact for positive social change in people's lives is a primary goal of action research, it also contributes to theoretical positions and contributes to change in policy discourses. The OPP interventions, based on the theory that the social mobilization of communities is key for self-help, and that people rather than governments know what is best for them, was proven through the success of OPP work in slums and peri-urban areas. The impact of OPP was so powerful that the government and UN agencies funded the RSPs who emulated the model in Pakistan and elsewhere in South Asia.²⁸ OPP has also been studied in academia as an influential model for community development and empowerment. It has thus exerted influence directly upon people's lives and by working together, the researchers and practitioners learnt from the community, while the process contributed to building on theory and policy. The two-way relationship between researchers, practitioners and the community is considered important from a methodological perspective.²⁹

In Afghanistan, the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has worked along similar lines as the RSP model in Pakistan.³⁰ Henri Suter, the Rural Development Programme Coordinator at AKF in Kabul, involved the Research in Alternative Livelihoods Fund (RALF) research project that aimed to eradicate poppy production in Afghanistan's northeast. According to Suter, poppy cultivation and opium production led to widespread addiction in the villages where 60% villagers were said to be addicted. This led to increasing impoverishment, loss of assets (especially land), livelihoods, food insecurity and associated issues of malnutrition and addiction among children, high maternal and child mortality rates. The research in the northeastern districts indicated that addiction was rising due to poverty; people took more opium to calm hunger pangs and gave it to small children to keep them quiet. Consistent and multifaceted work over a four-year period finally yielded results through ensuring food distribution, implementing health and education interventions, poppy free trading, and building roads for access to remote areas. The reasons for the growing addiction could only

²⁸ The Rural Support Programs are a good example where the organizations work with the communities. However, their research side is weak as the emphasis is on community mobilization rather than engaging with theory or academia. Nonetheless, they often engage with critique and self-reflection vis a vis women's empowerment issues as they model their projects on a women in development (WID) approach while claiming to follow an empowerment approach within gender and development (GAD).

²⁹ The emphasis on action research led PILER to initiate a project with the football industry in Sialkot, Pakistan, where NIKE was pulling out due to issues of child labor. PILER was able to convince NIKE, owners and workers at the factory to work together to rid themselves of child labor as this was in the best interests of the community. Not an easy task, PILER workers succeeded after building a long-term relationship with the community.

³⁰ The Aga Khan Foundation's Rural Support Program (AKRSP) in Pakistan's Northern Areas was the first to emulate the OPP model in Pakistan; the AKF initiative in North Eastern Afghanistan has obvious links and underlying assumptions with the AKRSP.

be tackled effectively through the identification of the correct causal link. Later, the National Solidarity Program of the Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation also designed its interventions along the same framework as the AKF work.

Similar emphasis on research at the community level in Afghanistan also comes from research institutions and leading researchers who believe that more than surveys are needed to understand people's lived experience and inform policy interventions. AREU has also undertaken research on family violence in Afghanistan's rural areas that are accessible to Afghan researchers. Through such initiatives, researchers feel that they can actually contribute not only to people's lives in a positive way but also impact the direction of policy-making.

A unique initiative –combining research, advocacy and media– results from the need to communicate with the public about the conflict that continues to haunt and impact people's lives in Afghanistan. The media is also beginning to play a role in impacting policy debate. More recently, non-commercial independent media has been established to “educate and inspire in an effort to give the public the intellectual tools they need to recover after three decades of war and turmoil.” An important program on radio is “Afghanistan in the last four decades” that aims to produce a public record of Afghanistan's recent history through interviews with survivors and perpetrators of the conflict spanning 40 years. Journalists had to be trained in qualitative research interview techniques so programs can keep the principal theme of violence and its impacts at the center of the program while respecting the views and experiences of the survivors. There have been protests against airing the program as powerful political figures are implicated. These programs will be compiled into CDs and multi-volume book in all major languages and made available nationally and internationally.³¹

Policy Research

Policy advice is considered by many to be the primary task of research in terms of justifying the money spent on research. The legitimacy and validity of research has come to be viewed by its usefulness to the state. Thus policy research is considered to be the *raison d'être* for any research in developing countries. Some researchers question whether advice to the government is the only form of policy research. They assert that effecting change in policy through informed civil society activism also constitutes policy research, as the government is not the only actor involved in policy making. There are also issues of ethics where social science research may contribute to militarized development in active conflict zones.

Most research institutes consider policy research for the government the sole justification for their being. Donors also exert pressure upon non-government research institutions to demonstrate their impact upon government policy through its various ministries and commissions. Interestingly, parliaments in both Afghanistan and Pakistan seldom solicit research for making informed policy-decisions. Policy research is thus predominantly engaged with government bureaucracies, not with elected representatives or with universities.

Those who provide policy advice in Pakistan and Afghanistan have little or no interest in influencing or making inroads into academia. The outcome is that students at universities continue to study outdated syllabi without exposure to the debates within the policy realm

³¹ The Killid Group website: http://www.thekillidgroup.com/c/highlights/highlights_four_decades.htm accessed April 3, 2009

and after graduation few are qualified for employment at policy research institutes. In the words of a researcher (equally applicable to both Afghanistan and Pakistan), “There is no academic research at universities. Undergraduates are never asked to write papers or essays during their tenure at the university. There is no training in research or even mention of it. Final year students have to write a monograph in order to graduate. But this tends to be pages copied out of old books and journals.” (Interview notes, February 2009)

Policy research needs a conducive environment where researchers observe basic principles. Plagiarism haunts Pakistani universities and there are instances where faculty defended their colleagues’ plagiarism against possible dismissal according to HEC rules.³² In Pakistan, a combination of campus violence (especially in the 1980s), lack of incentives and capacity for research in a non-existent research environment for debate and the introduction of the civil service grade system (primarily based on years of service) for faculty was the death-knell of academia’s contribution to policy research. In Afghanistan, universities have reopened after 2002 with a few research policy centers (affiliated with the universities) attempting to impact policy in specific areas like law, economic and social development. However, their output is small at the moment, as it takes time to build such centers and produce research that will impact policy. Moreover, student violence continues to be a threat. At Kabul University, tensions have emerged between student groups over issues of terminology and nomenclature.³³ With such trends in place, the growth of policy research shall remain a challenge in the higher education context in both countries.

The challenge in Afghanistan for policy research is deepened by the lack of social sector statistics. Donors and government demand that the line of policy reasoning be proven with numbers rather than high-quality qualitative research. The legitimacy of any research finding is dictated by percentages and in the absence of reliable national level data, it is difficult to convince policymakers to make policy change (interview notes, Paula Kantor, AREU, November 2008). To fill statistical gaps, massive surveys were contracted out to large survey firms who hired and trained Afghans for data collection. Some researchers critique these practices that they do not consider ‘real academic research.’ (interview notes, February 2009).

Academically informed policy research is difficult to pursue in Afghanistan where trained researchers often accept employment with donor agencies, private companies or opt for consulting work. In Pakistan, the situation is similar. Economists, considered to be the primary source of policy advice, had little incentive to stay with the government’s research organizations like the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and the Applied Economics Research Center (AERC). Many left these institutions for the IMF, ADB or employment abroad³⁴, while others joined the consulting market.³⁵

³² The incident at the University of the Punjab received wide coverage in leading newspapers. Other instances of plagiarism have also been brought up at Karachi University and University of Jamshoro. Though plagiarism is considered academic death, some faculty believe that it should not lead to dismissal as there are few qualified teachers available and fewer still are aware of the unacceptability of plagiarism. (for details of such debates, see Education-Zine of The News, April 20, 2007. <http://www.jang.com.pk/thenews/apr2007-weekly/education-20-04-2007/> accessed April 7, 2009.

³³ For example, there was a demand that university be called *Danishgah* rather than traditional *Pohantoon*. The issue became contentious as some viewed this to be an attempt to Persianise Afghan languages through a perceived threat of growing Iranian cultural hegemony.

³⁴ For details, see S. Akbar Zaidi’s article, “Dismal state of social sciences in Pakistan” in Economic Political Weekly, August 2002.

Researchers-turned-consultants have produced high-quality reports. Development consulting could constitute a potentially rich source of policy research that influences policy debate and policy reform. However, this body of work is unavailable in the public domain for inclusion in any sustained debate about solution-oriented research. There are other limitations also: consulting assignments are not designed to produce public debate about the underlying theoretical assumptions that inform the conceptualization of a project. Many assignments have limited scope, e.g. project specific monitoring and evaluation missions or designing a donor's country strategy that end at the funding institution's desk. Thus most consulting assignments are conducted in isolation, and their impact upon policy is unmeasured and unknown.

Policy advice can be problematic when it mixes military and development work in conflict zones. Omidian (2009) writes about the Human Terrain System (HTS), introduced by the US government in Afghanistan and Iraq and that is beginning to find its way into Pakistan's conflict areas. In HTS social scientists work for the military or its associated contractors and ostensibly "the goal is to help the military understand local communities and reduce the number of deaths." Militarized development in Afghanistan's eastern provinces under the PRTs (provincial reconstruction teams) and in Pakistan with the creation of Economic Opportunity Zones along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border results in a dangerous blend, one in which the researcher and the researched can be at risk. This is largely because such research is seen to be part of counterinsurgency operations. The moral dilemmas of conducting policy relevant research in conflict zones are complex as allies can become enemy, and research can be used for counterinsurgency, making the issue of policy advice in such circumstances highly risky physically, politically and ethically.

We can conclude that policy research is useful if policy-makers are receptive and if researchers can produce it quickly according to need. They also need to use innovative methods for disseminating their standpoint as few policy makers are likely to have the time to read the work or engage with it. There are gaps that the policy research community faces ranging from the lack of links with universities (that are plagued by severe problems) to the lack of well-qualified and trained researchers. Further, much advice that could be in the public realm is restricted to the funding institution, thereby limiting questions about development project assumptions, impact and spending. Finally, there are ethical dilemmas in connection with policy advice developed for civil-military development interventions in active conflict zones where researchers produce work that may be used for counterinsurgency or military objectives. Pakistani and Afghan researchers and survey workers are generally unaware that when they become a part of such initiatives in active conflict zones, they may be leading to militarized research rather than policy advice that is assumed to benefit everyone.

³⁵ For example, Dr Tariq Hussain, Haris Gazdar, Dr Asad Sayeed are well-respected economists, with degrees from Columbia, LSE and Cambridge respectively, who have joined the consulting world.

4. Government, Donor and NGO Priorities

The Pakistan government, having created various research institutes for policy input such as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) and the Applied Economics Research Center (AERC), is uninterested in receiving policy advice. According to Assad and Khurshid (2002), “The government is simply ‘not interested in knowledge production, either in its own right or as put forward by people’s needs as one participant pointed out. The drive for selecting a particular research theme is the amount of funds that it can generate, which ultimately results in following the donors’ agenda. For research institutes, lack of funding has been termed as a major obstacle in carrying out more research. This further underscores the influence exerted by donors in the whole process of knowledge production.”

According to one respondent, “The government veers from crisis to crisis and as such is unable to follow any medium or even short-term policy. Both bureaucrats and politicians through sheer dint of experience have learned to respond to the crisis.” He elaborated, “The Government is generally in haste. And in our type of countries, it does not follow any long-term vision and not even a plan. Even if the vision or plan is written, no one follows it. Policy is in response to immediate developments e.g. a price hike. Policymakers have to take a decision at that moment and they can’t start researching the issue; most policymakers who facilitate or take decisions have enough experience to quickly say something. They don’t need research... they think policymaking is problem solving. The papers that go for decisions are actually called summaries and are summaries.³⁶ So this shows how much reading goes into a decision... But, if it is a new issue that has just cropped up, then they are desperately looking for anything and anybody who has done some work. This is where the other side is lacking. They don’t know when to throw research at government.” (Interview notes, December 2008).

The case of Afghanistan is somewhat different. The government in tandem with international organizations and foreign embassies has reopened, rebuilt, and launched universities and research centers (discussed in the earlier section on ‘Eroding research capacities’). It will take time for the universities and research centers to provide a substantive body of policy research. As discussed earlier, the quality of curriculum, faculty and students remain the main challenges and shall be the main hurdle to developing local research capacity.

According to one academic, the Afghan government capacity to identify research questions is negligible; donors set and fund policy for the government. There is little understanding of the role of research in policy making with few connections between policy makers, implementers and the research community. The main interest of the government revolves around obtaining and controlling donor funds while the latter “push through development, with all its attached conditions and flawed planning.” (Interview notes, February 2009).

A critical issue in Afghanistan is also the lack of time with policy makers to read research reports even if these are available in Pushto and Dari (dominant national languages). Communication strategies of research institutions are often dependent upon personal relationships with policymakers; if a minister or bureaucrat is inclined to ‘listen’ to research

³⁶ One respondent related an attempt to build a library at one of the wings of the Environment Ministry. A powerful federal secretary occupied it and made it his office after another Ministry was burnt by religious zealots of the Red Mosque in Islamabad in 2007. This person also noted that although the planning commission has research sections, there are no researchers there. Staff in these sections only award consultancies. (Interview notes, December 2008)

advice, it is incorporated into policy but if the key person does not prioritize such advice, it remains unnoticed (interview notes, January 2009).

Although independent research institutes have challenged some of the economic policy paradigms such as market-based frameworks within which poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) are framed, donors and government ignore these challenges both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In fact, strong evidence of the failure of structural adjustment policies provided by NGOs has not persuaded donors and the Pakistan government to review or change the course of the PRSPs.

While some research is ignored or dismissed, some other research is deemed sensitive and triggers negative responses. For example, in Pakistan the findings of a UNDP/Women's Ministry – initiated survey on domestic violence were suppressed because it included questions about marital rape. In Afghanistan, some research can elicit threatening responses from parliamentarians and other public representatives or people in power (warlords for instance). Questioning Pakistan's nuclearization was not appreciated by the government and related policy advice not welcome. SDPI's report on curriculum reform was debated and condemned in the Parliament while the donor who had funded it was concerned about the impact of the debate upon its relationship with the government.

As discussed earlier, a radio program to pressure the Afghan government to provide justice to survivors of violence elicited strong protests from some parliamentarians who were implicated as perpetrators. (Interview notes, December 2008). Patricia Omidian recounts her experience in Kandahar in 2002 when she documented "one unexpected cause of maternal mortality that was not liked by the agency funding the study. It was that US military action was a leading contributor to the death of women of childbearing age in the areas we visited." She describes how her contact person in the UN in Kabul asked her to remove this information from her final report as it would upset the US donor. When she refused because it was important for her to give voice to those she had met and interviewed, her study was not circulated with the quantitative survey.

The issue is not only one of 'hearing' what has been researched and advocated, but also pertains to the subject at hand. The effectiveness of research is related not only to its quality, but to the willingness of the external environment to accept, ignore or discard the findings.

4.1 Donors

In Pakistan and Afghanistan, foreign donors fund policy research primarily in the area of social development while the two governments are donors for their own think tanks who provide advice on politically sensitive foreign policy issues. This section addresses the issues faced by foreign donors in an uncertain political and security environment. It segregates donors into two types: those that fund specific research reports as background documents for their policy interventions and, those that are primarily research funding organizations.

Development Assistance Donors — Most bi- and multilateral donors commission research on particular topics within their own pre-existing priority areas. While they usually do not directly dictate the content or tilt of the work, the overall approach to the problem and its solutions are contained in the manner in which the TORs are drafted.

However, some of the powerful international finance institutions (IFIs) in Pakistan set the parameters for what is to be researched. Usually the World Bank coordinates its investment in a country with bilateral donors and conducts research (assessments) that focus on their priority areas. The following quote is telling:

“The World Bank on the other hand claimed that its research agenda was ‘client- driven’, the client in this case being the Government of Pakistan. The Bank had an overarching theme of ‘poverty reduction’, however, and everything had to fit under that theme. The Bank has also started carrying out a CAS (country assessment strategy), which enables them to find out more about the issues, which demanded research. The Bank could initiate its own research anytime it wanted, so that it was ready to deal with any issue that the government might bring in. One example was that of the study on drought in Pakistan that was carried out prior to the request of the government to initiate it. So sometimes the research was done even before the ‘client’ expressed an interest in it. *Evidently, client needs also seem to be anticipated.*” [emphasis added]. (Assad and Khurshid, 2002). While it may be good for policy researchers to anticipate policy demand to some extent, in the case of powerful organizations such as the World Bank or the UN, the government is guided to make a particular demand after being informed about the availability of funds for the purpose.

The picture in Afghanistan is more acute in terms of the dominant role of donors. According to one respondent, “Foreigners wish to ‘rebuild quickly and get out’. They face the urgency of getting documents ready for international commitments. So, policy development is done by foreign consultants” (Interview notes, March 2009). So much so, that one respondent stated that, “...because of the lack of capacity within government and state institutions, it is difficult to have critical interventions. Also, today’s priority in Afghanistan is security. When it comes to policy decisions, which concerns people’s life in the next 5 to 10 years, there is less interest from the greater public. The best example is Afghanistan’s National Development Strategy (ANDS), which is a thick document and not even translated into local languages.”

Newly established organizations question current development thinking, but the critical mass required to effectively challenge and bring change may require more time and a stronger civil society with more informed perspectives. Some of the prominent research institutions are currently attempting to come together and form a group where they can negotiate collective positions on important issues affecting people’s interest.

Research Supporting Organizations — Research support organizations and other organizations that have specific funds earmarked for research, provide opportunities to local researchers for original and pioneering work. Many such organizations are physically located in their countries of origin (e.g. the Social Sciences Research Council, the MacArthur Foundation) either because they are small or because their programs for developing countries are small. Others maintain regional offices (e.g. Ford Foundation, IDRC, United States Institute for Peace). There are many challenges that such organizations face when they wish to work regionally as strained relations between two countries (as in the case of India and Pakistan) make cross-border projects difficult under hostile visa regimes and restrictions on funds transfers.

Even with the difficulties of funding research in hostile countries, such organizations are a boon for local research organizations as they recognize the importance of research in difficult

settings. Their programs are designed to address the multiple challenges involved in research, whether capacity, access to library resources, or publishing. Research institutions in developing countries benefit from these organizations in particular. For example, approximately 65% of SDPI research funding came from such donors in Europe and North America while 35% came from mainstream development donors discussed in the preceding subsection.³⁷

The role of key decision-making personnel in such organizations is critical. A particular program officer or director may be willing to take risks and fund innovative programs while others may follow institutional guidelines in an inflexible fashion. For example, program officers at IDRC and Ford Foundation who are sympathetic to the need for researching topics deemed outside the traditional ‘development’ milieu exhibited flexibility and funded research that other mainstream development donors were unwilling to fund. The SDPI workshop on the 1971 breakup of Pakistan/creation of Bangladesh, and Women, Conflict and Security are good examples of such research support from the two organizations. The former brought Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian scholars together for the first time in 35 years to discuss the 1971 violence, and to develop new trilateral perspectives that build dialogue and theory. This workshop resulted in several spin-offs including special sessions at the South Asia conference in Wisconsin, other research projects, and advocacy work on the 1971 theme with college and university students who need to understand why these violent events continue to shape politics in Pakistan and Bangladesh to date. A project begun in 1999 brought Afghan and Pakistani women’s voices and experience of conflict to the center. It may not have had a direct impact upon policy but it certainly reinforced the issue of women’s needs and concerns especially after September 11, 2001 when violence in the two countries escalated. Similarly, SDPI’s immersion course on Peace, Violence and Development led to positive interventions by many participants who were able to put knowledge acquired through the course into action in favor of the more vulnerable among the internally displaced persons (IDPs) when conflict engulfed one province of the country. Interestingly, other development organizations have emulated this intervention having realized its relevance in Pakistan. However, at the time it was conceptualized in 2007, few were even willing to look at the project proposal. This is because mainstream development donors are unable to perceive the connections between unequal development and violence/conflict as they prefer insular policy approaches that present development as a technical management issue. This approach has its benefits but is ultimately limiting.

We can conclude that several types of support are needed for development research. Two ends of the spectrum are represented by narrowly defined interventions. At one end development is seen as a simple uncontested good in need of management tools. At the other end, development is represented by voices that insist upon incorporating issues of violence and politics that are generally perceived to be outside the domain of policy discourse. This includes the long-term effects of violent events that impact people’s lives for decades without formally coming under the ambit of development. Many possible complementarities exist between these two ends of the spectrum. Therefore, the lens that a research support organization applies may produce new approaches to understanding the complex processes of development not just in short-term but in long-term perspectives spanning decades.

³⁷ For details, see various Annual Reports of the Institute.

Inability to fund research on sensitive issues — Donors, especially those that represent their governments, act under two types of constraints: they are constrained by their relations with the host government on the one hand and they are constrained by their own government's domestic policies on the other hand. For example, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) does not provide research funds for abortion rights.

Donors avoid funding issues that may embarrass the host government or strain their relations. Until the government recognizes a problem, donors are reluctant to fund research related to it. Politically sensitive issues whether at the global, national or local level are difficult if not impossible to fund. For example, though there are many donor-funded reports about Afghan refugees offering piecemeal solutions, there are hardly any reports about the reasons behind the emergence and expanding numbers of Afghan refugees. Another example of donor constraints revolves around investigation of different impacts of the War on Terror and its impacts on people's lives in Pakistan. Similarly, donors avoided funding work on internal conflict in Pakistan. There is very little research on the Karachi conflict spread across two decades although it impacted the lives and livelihood of thousands of poor people. The Karachi conflict is seldom connected with issues of development. When I tried to add in Karachi violence into a project report as an important contributory factor in the expansion of women's home-based work and the informal sector, this was considered to be not directly relevant.

Policy research on internal conflict and development has been neglected because the Pakistan government views any donor funding for conflict related issues as 'foreign interference.' For example, the Pakistani federal government placed restrictions upon access to Balochistan province for humanitarian assistance following devastating floods in 2007 where an insurgency-like situation existed. The fear that the UN may invoke the humanitarian imperative and that some foreign NGOs may aid the insurgents to create instability for political reasons made the government restrict access of non-Pakistanis to the province during a natural disaster. This has deterred other donors from funding any research on the conflict in Balochistan.

The dilemmas of any kind of development work in districts where government control barely exists is a challenge for donors. Travel advisories often prevent foreign nationals from visiting vulnerable areas; therefore, they can neither commit funds to an area where they have little or no direct access nor can they send staff for any capacity building to such areas. Many are concerned about accountability issues in such areas. In both Afghanistan and Pakistan's conflict zones, such situations are compounded by the isolation of some areas that are not connected by roads to nearby towns. For example, some areas in northern Afghanistan are 14-16 days donkey ride away and after the snow sets in, the areas were totally cut off. In Southern Afghanistan, donors desperately look for partners as commanders block access to local population in need of help. In such areas, distance learning and indirect access through relatives is a way out for those organizations that are determined to initiate 'invisible development'.

More recently, due to a controversial US policy of drone attacks in Pakistan's border areas and the resultant resentment, a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) commitment of 750 million for 5 years to develop Pakistan's border areas can only operate through the government and third party contracts to NGOs. Independent researchers have little or no access not only due to the life-threatening risks but also because the government does not want independent researchers to enter the area as it suspects that they may have

other agendas. Although USAID is very influential in the area, its logo is not displayed anywhere, as NGOs suspected of receiving US funds are vulnerable to attacks. Other donors are reluctant to fund research in such areas due to security fears. Sending in staff to such areas where they could be targets of different intolerant groups becomes an onerous responsibility. The local staff of an international NGO, Plan International, was targeted and killed for their work on children's education in the North West Frontier Province and more recently four staff members of a national NGO were killed in the same province due to an association with USAID funding.³⁸

The issue for donors is often that there is no specific pool of funds for policy research. Such research is funded from other programs. Donors are driven by the need to show results in short frames. There is institutional bias against taking time—something that research requires (interview notes, Kabul, March 2009). Associated with this is the issue of quick changes in staff; donors send in staff for short duration—sometimes only a year, during which time the staff spend the initial four to six months familiarizing themselves with the issues and the remaining time to prepare for the next assignment. A “constant revolving door” is how one respondent phrased it. The pressure upon staff posted for a short term to demonstrate tangible progress results in short-term perspectives. Under such circumstances, research initiatives suffer. In addition, due to the on-going high risk security situation, foreign staff actually spend their time behind barricaded walls and do not have any opportunity to interact with local people who may know more about their needs.

Demands of taxpayers at home — Very little research funding is available for debate on such dilemmas as most development agencies prioritize development funding with service delivery. Donors explain that they cannot justify supporting research to their taxpayers as better quality research is conducted and abundantly available in their own countries. They need to show their taxpayer what they have achieved on the ground. This is best demonstrated by funding a school, a forestry project or a community water supply scheme where pictures can tell a tangible story. Research cannot do this as effectively.

Sometimes the pressure to demonstrate improvements lead to questionable manipulation of research instruments. For example, a survey report by a leading American university indicating that child mortality had been reduced drastically has been questioned in Afghanistan. One respondent explained that the inflated improvement was impossible to achieve and was only constructed to show that the aid to the government in Kabul was being effectively used. The issue of improved indices in Afghanistan was traced to questions of aid effectiveness being raised in donor countries.

³⁸ See The News, April 6, 2009 http://thenews.com.pk/top_story_detail.asp?Id=21371 Three female NGO workers, driver shot dead in Mansehra, accessed 12 April, 2009

4.2 NGOs

The limits of questioning — Topics that can be researched and raised with the help of donor funding also exhibit a dual pattern. For example, when to raise gender issues and when to be silent and complicit with patriarchy is an important way of rewarding and punishing. Local researchers' critique of donor gender practice is not well received. Hence, when the UN Development Program (UNDP) in Pakistan invited Sarwar Khan (complicit in the high profile honor killing of his daughter) for a 3-year future planning meeting in 2003, women's rights activists were politely reprimanded for demanding an apology. Perhaps incidental, but many of the organizations that we represented have not been invited or involved in any deliberations concerning gender issues at UNDP. While we are encouraged to question cultural practices and government policies, donor policy or practice informed by patriarchy are best left unchallenged. The questioning of the Income Generation Project for Refugee Affected Areas (IGPRA) which did not provide any employment to Afghan refugee women while inducting 14 years old boys over a ten-year period was resented by the World Bank—the manager of the project. The World Bank representative at the assessment meeting explained to me that conservative Afghan culture did not allow women to access employment at a time when many Afghan women and children were begging on the streets.

Patriarchy is not the only discourse that may be selectively questioned. Opposition to the celebration of Pakistan's nuclearization resulted in threats from the 'father of the nuclear bomb' who said that any organization opposing nuclearization would risk its assets and funds frozen. Although this did not happen, the public threat and the possibility of closure was a daunting prospect.

Limits upon research capacities — The division of intellectual labor whereby locals conduct field research and foreign consultants author the analytical part is one aspect of NGO capacity issues. The other aspect partially results from local conditions that drive out good researchers and scholars. There are few good researchers available while unemployed university graduates are abundantly available. Junior researchers coming from public sector universities are usually assigned to fieldwork due to their knowledge of local languages and conditions, while foreign consultants write the reports and recommendations for policy. Also, due to dearth of local capacity, donors offer available researchers with foreign qualification high salaries in return for managerial work. The members of the research community who could contribute to research are utilized for fairly routine day-to-day administrative and supervisory types of work.

Independent research institutions and non-governmental organizations in Pakistan and Afghanistan seldom have endowments and are dependent on donors for their survival. As one respondent puts it, "A number of 'independent' think tanks have also sprung up, mostly run by a combination of internationals and Afghans. They may be independent of the Afghan government, but again not of donors and/or Afghan political groups." (interview notes, February 2009). Few organizations are financially sustainable. Their research agendas are often designed in an environment where the priorities may not be grassroots up. These institutions are accountable not to the people they are aiming to benefit/work for, but to their funders. The dynamics of how they devise their programs and their focus is dictated by the parameters of funding rather than what may be needed on the ground. This has advantages and disadvantages. While donor funding has helped highlight human rights issues that otherwise may get swept under the carpet, they have also prevented debate on issues that may

be relevant to ordinary women and men. Their lived experience does not always fall within the narrowly defined realm of development work or donor priority areas.

Funding uncertainty forces some NGOs to move toward innovative ways of building endowments or stretching funds for lean periods. They are then labeled as non-transparent and dishonest, a reputation that discourages well-qualified applicants. Donors cannot provide endowment funding; the government is unwilling to do so as well. NGOs are in a constant dependency syndrome whereby instead of producing their own visions and prioritizing issues they consider important, they are led by donor priorities as stated in their country plans. As the process of accessing funding has become fine-tuned in terms of project proposal writing and associated contacts, connections, posturing and jargon, many NGOs have lost track of their original purpose and shifted their priorities in accordance with issues that receive funding. Their original visions and mandates often become irrelevant. They turn strategically and instrumentally toward funding rather than a genuine concern for the issues being advocated.

5. Reflections and Recommendations

The main question how is research used for development in difficult settings has no easy answers. The broad message is that there is no single solution, but multiple, complementary efforts are needed to strengthen the research environment.

Research is not irrelevant in such settings even though the development community determines its value by its policy relevance alone. The current situation indicates the limited use of research for theory building, the limited utilization of research for policy change as well as the inadequate amount of action research in the short-term. Social science research contributes to policy debate and change in the longer term. In the short term, changes in the political environment impact policy which then impacts the funds to conduct and legitimate particular types of research.

The non-availability of discursive spaces in such settings is a key area that needs to be addressed. The idea that social scientists are free to pursue research that is relevant is straitjacketed by preset agendas. The **freedom to pursue topics** that are important for the local community is lacking. Most NGO researchers feel isolated and have little incentive for theory building derived from their lived experience. Research proposals are funded in accordance with donor priorities, not a research institution's priorities. With time, development research institutions that lack endowments or other institutional support become so responsive to donor priorities that they forget their own. This happens easily as the development setting requires urgent interventions in about every direction. Institutions become adept at proposal development according to specific formats and terminology but reduce their own creative imagination to envision their own priorities. A key area for intervention is providing opportunities to researchers and practitioners to learn from and reflect upon their experience and ground realities to form their own priorities. This freedom can also come through the provision of well-thought-out institutional support or opportunities for short-term or year-long fellowships in their own countries or at other universities.

There are few instances of debate and critique among intellectuals and development professionals. There are parallel streams of researchers and intellectual ideas that seldom meet in a dynamic fashion. Donor driven project research is considered policy research. This

research is seldom available in the public domain for debate. Private consultants and state intellectuals (who work at state run research institutions) have no incentive to bring their research to public scrutiny or debate. Their policy advice and conclusions can often be predicted in accordance with the paradigm in which their project work is conceptualized. This makes the non-availability of intellectual spaces more pronounced.

Despite the above, the impetus for intellectual debate exists in these settings where people desperately wish to **understand the fluid and rapidly changing environment** around them. Individual researchers grapple with critical issues for development policy, e.g., the manner in which their contexts are presented, represented and stereotyped to make spaces and justify particular types of policy interventions. They wish to challenge such constructs. Across the region, a critical mass of independent-minded public intellectuals share some common features: They lack a physical space to come together for debate and discussion beyond short workshops and seminars. Some of these researchers and intellectuals have proposed the idea of a South Asian University where they could teach groups of students from South Asia and inculcate a regional sensibility that would cut across the interstate conflicts and sources of tension.

How can such spaces be created, nurtured and maintained? We find that the state often creates the infrastructure and bureaucracy for such initiatives yet it is unable to put life into them. These initiatives often appear doomed even before they are fully realized. It seems that the idea of a South Asian University, after it was handed to SAARC, has taken a backseat due to the slow progress of discussions at SAARC meetings and follow-ups.

One critical space that has appeared over the last few years is the quick expansion of the electronic media, especially the emergence of independent radio, television and newspapers. Programs for entertainment are costlier than discussions on current issues; thus all channels provide news coverage and analysis. Active participation by intellectuals and researchers influences **how people think about issues**. There have been preliminary discussions among NGOs in Pakistan about buying television time for projecting issues of research and advocacy. To bring environmental issues or labor issues to the attention of the viewer, it is important for NGOs to come together and plan out programs and discussion of these issues via television and FM radio. In Afghanistan, Afghan NGOs assert that aside from talking directly to policy makers and providing consultations for MPs, their staff participates in televised debates, using the media to convey and promote their viewpoint. This is their comparative advantage over foreign organizations that do not have the same access in terms of language and communication with the people.

At the beginning of this paper, I flag the difficulties of conducting research in a country where violence has intensified many fold. The main challenge to research in difficult situations is the difficult situation itself. The removal of the 'difficulties' is imperative to make the research environment viable. Such situations, especially if they involve violent conflict, lead to a process of de-intellectualization by literally un-grounding the researcher. Although a researcher may not be physically present in an active conflict zone, yet the impacts of the violence are felt throughout a country and sometimes the region. Thus difficult settings are not necessarily restricted to active conflict zones; in fact, even within active conflict zones there are usually safe pockets while the so-called peace zones are not necessarily very secure. Conditions of security and political stability are fluid, making it **risky to conduct research** in some areas. The fluidity also provides opportunities to quickly enter an area when violence has ceased to conduct quick research. Thus within a single

country, there can be different and shifting settings of difficulty and each setting may need a different approach, not a one-size-fits-all approach.

While data collection takes place in the difficult settings, the need to produce quick band-aid type solutions does not provide researchers the necessary distance and time to reflect upon longer-term processes and solutions. Collecting quantitative data is important but how it is used is critical. In-depth data analysis and theorizing is prevented due to the urgency of the situation or due to short project cycles related to constantly changing contexts and conditions. Short deadlines and the need to obtain the next contract, in short “projectization”, prevents researchers from contextualizing their experience and making interventions in development discourse internationally. Despite the above, researchers have tried to challenge some policy frameworks effectively within their own contexts through campaigns, press statements, etc. To be critically effective, researchers need to make interventions at other levels as well.

Projectization in general obstructs researchers from publishing books and writing articles for leading journals regionally and internationally. Such writings, possibly critiquing or reinforcing development policy premises on the basis of developing country experience, may significantly impact development debates at leading universities and development think tanks in the West. Professors at these universities provide input into development policy frameworks within the international development aid departments/ministries in their countries. Interventions, therefore, from researchers in developing countries that could influence the debate at western forums would be critical policy intervention. To be able to do so, researchers in developing country contexts need to be equipped not only with the necessary academic training but also the **ability to think beyond project deliverables**.

In addition to the need to theorize, the need to build **skills for basic data collection** is needed. There are complementarities between quantitative and qualitative research. Usually enumerators receive on-the-job training to conduct a particular survey but they lack knowledge about the issues involved in quantitative methods. They also need to be sensitized about fieldwork methods including the power dynamics that may play out in the field with respondents. Issues of safety and security have already been mentioned; far too often because fieldworkers are from the local communities, they are expected to monitor security. Their own security is sometimes overlooked. Therefore standard lists and formats for best practice should be produced and institutions sensitized to these issues. Further, institutions should be gauged on the basis of good practice: whether mentoring is available, whether there are opportunities for other training, forums for discussion and longer term advanced academic training (including going abroad for a Masters or PhD program) should be included in the opportunities institutions offer their teams. This would prevent the creation of a hierarchy of **local enumerators and outside researchers**.

The fairly standard issues of safety and security of researchers, respondents and confidentiality of data are widely recognized. However, issues of ethics have not yet surfaced to the extent needed. The sensitivity of different types of research can pose a risk for a researcher especially if it involves issues of fundamental rights and justice. However, the issue of providing advice to the military for development issues as part of counterinsurgency or other political motives needs to be debated openly. At present there is very little public debate or awareness about the issue.

To make research attractive and create a sense of intellectual community, I argue for a combination of different types of research support for building capacity over the longer term.

This does not imply that projects for survey and band-aid type problem solving over the short-term lack utility. However, research support is comparatively easily available for those kinds of activities from service delivery donors. Research supporting organizations can consider longer-term research projects that can **promote a culture of research and inquiry**. This can be achieved through different strategies ranging from direct research support to encouraging independent research centers to form consortiums for long-term research. Public sector research organizations usually have access to funds from the government for projects and research related activities, therefore, they may not be the ideal candidates for such funding.

The following recommendations are proposed:

1. *Create flexible pools for funding research.* This means that some allocations should be available from a common pool to established researchers and institutions on a priority basis who may apply at any time of the year. These applications can go through a process of peer review and improvement. Donors could work with/fund individual researchers where working through an organization may be a security risk. However, donors would need to ensure that research can be disseminated widely. Funding individual researchers has to do with a political and ethical position as a means of encouraging debate in the public arena. Another pool of research funding can be available for specific themes and be open to applicants once a year. Both types of funding can be available to individual researchers and to institutions.
2. *Study-abroad fellowships for researchers at risk.* Such fellowships can be restricted in number and need-based rather than being a regular feature of the research landscape. The fellowships would have to be managed by a high-level panel of experts who also have clout within government circles. This would ensure that the researcher is allowed to proceed abroad and is protected from harassment abroad.
3. *Train researchers on an ongoing basis* at the national and regional level. Institutions and concerned researchers have a fairly clear picture of weaknesses in research capacity. No single organization can make more than a small dent in the huge gap in existing research capacities but a combination of internship programs and training programs may address this gap on a small scale. Different types of training need to be pitched at different levels for beginners and advanced level participants. Such training can cover an array of areas in need of capacity building, for example:
 - participatory fieldwork (including awareness of community-level conflict);
 - in quantitative and qualitative methods of field work and research;
 - for conceptual clarity and in-depth knowledge of development approaches;
 - for proposal and report writing..
4. *Supporting researchers to use mass media.* TV and radio are effective tools for policy debate in a setting where few people read. Concerns that those who fund the media also control it can be circumvented through buying time on television and radio for programs and documentaries on development policy issues. This has been debated among think tanks that focus on specific areas such as environmental protection. Researchers often lack the skills of effective communication via radio and television as they are often occupied with writing for a specialized audience. They require skills to communicate their research results and recommendations into effective messages for a general audience. Persons in the media are generally weary of ‘academic’ slants

as they fear their audience is actively uninterested in such discussions. A key intervention could be media ‘cells’ where trained professionals can translate messages based on in-depth research into an easily comprehensible and popular programming format.

5. *Build research capacity into development projects:* Development projects usually include training on field research protocols for enumerators. However, this approach creates a hierarchy between fieldworkers and researchers. Ideally, development projects should include building research capacity of young professional whether they are fieldworkers or junior researchers. This means not just a narrow training about the specific instruments to be used in the field but knowledge about analytical issues involved in the project and wider development debates. Donors can thus emphasize that building and enhancing research capacities should be intrinsic to project design whether it pertains to governance, gender, or security.
6. *Ethical and Methodological Issues:* Donors need to ensure that issues about security of research teams and respondents be intrinsic parts of project proposals. These include ensuring the physical safety of all involved, the confidentiality of data, that respondents know what to expect, and that security related delays—even inordinate ones—may take place. Flexibility for alternative fieldwork sites may also be built into projects. Protocols about the dos and don’ts of fieldwork have to be developed in advance including watching out for ethnic and religious tensions. Such generic issues are endemic to fieldwork but new issues of ethics have also arisen. For example, should researchers provide policy advice to militaries? How can donors ensure that researchers living in militarized states receive support for independent research? These questions involve judgment calls and need to be publicly debated.
7. *Endowments and/or lifeline support:* Having resources to conduct their own research provides institutions with tremendous freedom to pursue their goals and agendas. At present too many institutions have to bid for projects to have the freedom to follow their original mandate. Many institutions face constant financial pressure, as their survival is dependent upon projects. Some have attempted to create endowments so their basic expenses are covered but with weak governments and an elite uninterested in supporting research, it is almost impossible to do so. Others have resorted to creative ways of building their material assets, as in the case of the Killid Group in Afghanistan. This group is more dependent upon its publications and the advertisements that these carry than upon donor funding. This enables institutions and scholars to conduct research even on sensitive topics, such as justice and war crimes. If providing endowments are not within the mandate of a donor, long-term institutional support can also help research institutions through lean periods when financial constraints can lead to staff retrenchment and institutional weaknesses. It would also help avoid ‘death through projectization.’ However, many researchers fear that endowments and assured support may result in ‘dead’ organizations as these would have little incentive for producing high quality work. This perspective is debatable but should be considered as some institutions lost their critical edge.
8. *Provide long-term sustained support* to research as opposed to short-term project support. Short-term project specific funding for measurable results is relatively freely available but donors are unwilling to provide long-term support for issues that may not be measurable but nevertheless whose impact can be felt. Due to results-based

matrices and log frames, complex social phenomena are reduced to tables and formats within which researchers are constrained to work. These methods do have utility for development interventions but lack the cumulative impact of long-term support. Tangible results can be observed in Pakistan in the case of fighting for rights of the marginalized whether women, children, religious minorities or other categories of the disadvantaged. The raised levels of awareness among people in Pakistan and Afghanistan is largely due to participatory rights-based approaches to development. This strengthens the argument for continued investments in development research on a longer-term basis.

9. *Promote regional contacts* for existing institutions where individual researchers from the region can be visiting scholars for a limited time. Such opportunities would not only increase interaction among researchers but also researchers can utilize library resources (especially gray literature unavailable elsewhere). For example, ACKU could be a resource and research center for the study of Afghanistan, both for Afghan and non-Afghan researchers. It is currently in the process of digitizing its collection to make it available to a wide array of users. Some types of documents may require permission for access due to the sensitive nature of the information they contain. For this kind of support, donors can link up such centers with other archives that already have safeguards in place for protection purposes. Similarly, a research institution like SDPI could house researchers from the region for 3 months-9 months. Internships could also be offered on the same lines so youth from the region could develop a better understanding of issues.
10. *Promote regional networks*: These allow researchers from the region to come together to produce joint work. This does not mean the creation of regional institutions but support to common intellectual endeavors and loose coalitions. South Asian development professionals and intellectuals could come together to push for issues of mutual interest. Such initiatives came out of the Colombo-based Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS) where a winter course on security and a spring course on non-traditional security were held each year for young professionals from South Asia and China. These courses and other workshops spawned networks among alumni and triggered joint research and edited volumes.
11. *Create a South Asian University*: This idea was originally proposed in the 1990s by a group of South Asian intellectuals. Given the long-standing interstate disputes, this university was envisioned with campuses in different countries where students and young professionals would have the opportunity to study together. This would provide the kind of exposure and intellectual space where experience sharing and mutual learning could take place. Such a university could focus on peace and security, justice, democracy and equality, natural resources, and the intellectual history of development. In short, it could address the three important aspects of research: theory building, action research and policy research. It would create an intellectual space for engagement. The conferences, meetings and training workshops that are held regularly inside the region as well as outside are one-off occasions. A South Asian University, whose blue print exists, would be a sustainable solution to a region that is rife with tensions among neighbors. The University could act as a confidence building measure among the people of the region.

12. *Government responsibility:* To produce good researchers, governments will have to commit more funds to higher education. Undertaking short-term training, as NGOs are wont to do, will only produce an army of fieldworkers. Governments will need to introduce radical shifts in their rules and regulations and revisit the purposes for establishing and running masters and PhD programs at public sector universities.
13. *Individuals who make a difference:* Just as there are differences amongst researchers, there are also differences amongst personnel in grant-making organizations. The two types of research donors —mainstream development organizations and research support organizations— employ different types of personnel to manage their programs. At the latter, staff usually have university degrees, often doctorates. They are comparatively more sympathetic to supporting innovative research in difficult settings. Much too often mainstream development donor staff who have little exposure to a culture of research treat research projects as managerial tasks: they exhibit little understanding of delays or changes that crop up unexpectedly. This results in fairly mechanical work that parrots other project reports, with no innovative or path-breaking work taking place.

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List of Acronyms

ACBAR Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
ANDS Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AERC Applied Economics Research Center
AIRD Afghanistan Institute for Rural Development
AKF Aga Khan Foundation
AKRSP Aga Khan Rural Support Program
ANCB Afghanistan NGOs Coordination Bureau
AREU Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ASR Applied Socio-Economic Research (Center)
CCPS Center for Conflict and Peace Studies
CMI Christian Michelson Institute
FAO Food and Agricultural Organization
FBOs Faith-Based Organizations
FC College Foreman Christian College
HEC Higher Education Commission (formerly UGC)
HRCP Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
ICC Islamic Coordination Council
IDRC International Development Research Center
IGPRA Income Generation Project for Refugee-Affected Areas
IFI International Finance Institution
IMF International Monetary Fund
LSE Lahore School of Economics
LUMS Lahore University of Management Sciences
NGO Non-Government Organization
NWFP North West Frontier Province
OPP Orangi Pilot Project
PIDE Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
PILER Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research
PRTs provincial reconstruction teams
RSP Rural Support Program
SDPI Sustainable Development Policy Institute
SPDC Social Policy Development Center
SSRC Social Sciences Research Council (USA)
SWABAC South West Afghanistan and Balochistan Association for Coordination
UGC University Grants Commission (Presently HEC)
UN United Nations
UNDP United Nations Development Program
UNOPS United Nations Operations
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USAID United States Agency for International Development
WHO World Health Organization
WTO World Trade Organization

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

IDRC supports researchers and innovators in the developing regions of the world to take the lead in producing and applying knowledge for the benefit of their own communities. IDRC's current programs focus on adapting to environmental change, social and economic policy (including health and conflict), the transformative role of ICTs, and innovation policy. This work tends to assume the ability to undertake and share research; yet this ability is undermined in locations experiencing violent conflict, divided societies, or political tension.³⁹

IDRC has supported research in locations as varied as Afghanistan, Haiti, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Lebanon and the West Bank and Gaza. Based on its experience, IDRC has identified four key challenges involved in supporting research in such settings: policy communities are overwhelmed or distracted; there is limited mobility of researchers and limited freedom to publish critical findings; existing institutions of higher learning and research have been eroded; and trained researchers and intellectuals have left the country.

The purpose of this paper is to frame a debate on how IDRC could respond to these four key challenges in the next corporate strategy.

- *How is research used for development in such settings?* Who generates the demand for research, how and who uses research findings for development (e.g. to identify the needs of poor people, to assess the impact of interventions, to gather shared information, to identify stakeholder positions, etc)? Who conducts this research and to what extent are local research communities engaged?
- *How to deal with the challenges of supporting research in such setting?* How do researchers deal with ethical and methodological issues involved (e.g. personal security, security of interviewees, and sensitivity of research)? What are the strengths and weaknesses of different strategies to support research? (e.g. lifeline support to maintain key research centres; supporting research based in neighbouring countries; engaging Diaspora communities based in other countries; offering study-abroad fellowships to researchers at risk; or including such settings in regional research networks, etc.)
- *What are the choices involved in engaging such settings?* Do research funders face a tension between building local research capacity and providing timely knowledge needed to inform action? What are the advantages of focusing on different state versus civil society researchers? How have donors dealt with the potential biases present in these settings?

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³⁹ These factors undermine the conditions that contribute to success of 'research for development' elsewhere. This understanding is separate from 'fragile states' (governments that cannot or will not provide basic services and protection for its citizens) and 'zones grises' (territories that lack state control). IDRC's work concerns mobilizing research to address development problems; thus it is primarily concerned with the vulnerability of the domestic research community and how research is used, rather than state capacity per se. Insights from the literature and evaluations emphasize understanding the political context and setting realistic (modest) goals. IDRC believes this is best achieved by working through people on the ground, or that are part of the societies intended to benefit from the research.

Annex 2: Interview Guide

NGOs/Research Institutes/Universities:

- Who demands that research on a particular area in development issues be conducted?
- Do you respond to the needs for policy research at the demand of the government, the donor or the local community?
- Are the demands from the above three communities somewhat similar? If there are differences, please explain.
- Is research capacity an issue? If so, how do you address it?
- How do you pursue your vision and mission statements given that there are funding constraints and capacity constraints? How can these issues be best addressed?
- How do you induce the policy community to 'listen' to your research findings and advice?
- Has research impacted policy formulation?
- How do you induce the policy community to 'listen' to your research findings and advice?
- What role can research institutions play in conducting grounded research and producing grounded theory?
- What are the challenges that you face in conducting research and ensuring its legitimacy?
- How do you disseminate research findings to make them widely available?
- If there is a conflict between research findings and the dominant policy paradigm, how do you navigate it? (e.g., research on structural adjustment policies showed that it had negative impacts yet it was difficult to change the particular path of development that was propagated by the World Bank).
- Are there spaces for critical interventions? If so, how are these identified and how may these be best pursued?

Donors:

- How are priorities decided within the donor community regarding development issues?
- How is funding allocated to different aspects of development?
- Is any research on local needs considered while prioritizing development funding?
- What percentage is usually allocated to research/policy advice, if any?
- What constraints do you face in supporting research for development?
- Are there requests from host government for funding research or research institutions?
- How does the host government respond to independent research funding?
- In your view, is research needed on development issues in difficult situations e.g. in Afghanistan and Pakistan where basic data is often unavailable or outdated?
- Given the pros and cons of conducting research in difficult situations, do you believe that research should be conducted through local partners? If so, what modalities do you propose for local researchers' safety and security?
- How do you ensure that research reports/policy advice meets a minimum standard if research capacities have eroded?
- Are there spaces for critical interventions? If so, how are these identified?

Government:

- Who drives the need for policy research?
- How is the policy-making process?
- Is research perceived to be essential for informing policy?
- Are there spaces for critical interventions? If so how are these decided?

Annex 3: Persons Interviewed

Pakistan

Akbar Zaidi, Independent economist, Karachi.
Karamat Ali, Pakistan Institute for Labor Education and Research (PILER), Karachi
Owaid Tohid, Journalist and media professional, Karachi.
Nighat Saeed Khan, ASR Resource Center, Lahore
Khawar Mumtaz, Shirkat Gah, Women's Resource Center, Lahore
Rubina Saigol, Independent scholar, Lahore
Arifa Zehra, Commission on the Status of Women, Government of Pakistan.
Pervez Tahir, Government College University, Lahore
Haroon Sharif, DFID, Islamabad
Kaiser Bengali, Former Managing Director, SPDC, Karachi
Barmak Pezhwak, USIP, Pakistan/Afghanistan desk, Washington DC

Afghanistan

Mr Waziri and Mr Sanaullah Tasal, Bacha Khan Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Kabul
Mr Ewen MacLeod, UNHCR
Mr Abdul Ghafoor Lewal, and colleagues, Regional Studies Center of Afghanistan
Ms Khwaga Kakar and Mr Atal Ahmadzai, Center for Policy and Human Development, Kabul University/UNDP
Ms Theresa de Languis, Unit Manager, Women, Peace and Governance Unit and Unifem Team,
Paula Kantor, (telephone interview) Executive Director, AREU
Deborah J. Smith, AREU
Royce Wiles, Coordinator, Human Resources, AREU
Shahir Zahine, The Killid Group
Melek Zimmer Zahine, Development and Humanitarian Services for Afghanistan
Professor Wadeer Saafi, Kabul University and International Development Law Organization
Haroun Mir, Afghanistan's Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS)
Henri Suter, Regional Programme Advisor, Asia, Aga Khan Foundation
Palwasha Hassan, Country Director, Rights and Democracy, Afghanistan
Ben Rowsell, and Mr Christopher Berzins, Canadian Embassy
Ehsan Zia, Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Kabul
Leila Jazayery (telephone interview)

List of Research Centers on the AREU Website

Afghanistan Center at Kabul University
Afghanistan Institute for Rural Development
Afghanistan Legal Documents Exchange Center
Afghanistan Center for Research and Policy Studies
Center for Peace and Conflict Studies
Center for Policy and Human Development
Center for Policy Priorities
Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium
Independent National Legal Training Center
Kabul Center for Strategic Studies
National Center for Policy Research
Regional Studies Center of Afghanistan